

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 Pastor Bill Uetrict 1/15/17 2 Epiphany

Sometimes I am taken by the little ironies that appear in Biblical texts. In today's second reading from First Corinthians we have Paul's introduction to the letter, its beginning. And I find it ironic that right off the bat, in the beginning, he mentions the ending. In the typical introductory thanksgiving of a letter of his era, Paul says: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given to you in Jesus Christ, for in every way you have been enriched in him, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the [End], the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

From the outset, the people of Corinth need to be pointed to the end, the future. And there's a reason for that. When Paul is introducing his correspondence to the Corinthians he needs to tell this community that there's more to come, that contrary to what some of them are thinking, they have not reached the goal. Some of them are convinced because of their religious experience that they are the arrived. You see, they have this great special knowledge. Some of them are speaking in wild tongues. They are exceptional—exceptionally spiritual, exceptionally in touch with the Spirit of God. Honestly, they don't need anything more. They've got what they need. And Paul, in his loaded introduction, is telling them that they don't. They are in a position of waiting. There's more yet to be revealed. There's more to learn. Life is always a process of becoming.

One of the challenges of proclaiming the gospel to well-off Americans is to be found in the reality that many of us are relatively satisfied. Oh, don't get me wrong. I know that many folks live in constant dissatisfaction. The fancy car that they have isn't fancy enough. The newest computer they own isn't new enough. But worrying about what kind of car you have is different than worrying about having a car. Sometimes when you have enough or more than

enough, there is a satisfaction that sinks in that makes visions of a different future or a new future not so important.

Frankly, much of the Bible addresses the reality of dissatisfaction. The Israelites in slavery want a different future. The exiles who have been sent far and wide by the cruel Babylonian empire want a new future. The prophets who are speaking to the people before and after the exile envision a *different* future. The Psalm writers who are in great despair, or are lamenting their current situation, long for a *new* work on God's behalf. The crowds that are following Jesus are expecting him to usher in a *new* reality—a new reality that Jesus actually says comes with the arrival of his very person. The author of Revelation envisions a way out of the old, reliable Roman-dominated situation that early Christians were living in. This author speaks of a *new* heaven and a new earth, a totally *new* order of things.

Much of the Bible speaks to the dissatisfied. Paul wants to call the Corinthians into dissatisfaction, which is why from the very beginning he mentions the end. There is more work to be done. It ain't over till it's over. You haven't arrived. You don't know everything. You haven't yet figured it out. Paul mentions that the Corinthians have been enriched in Christ, "in speech and knowledge of every kind." They had been given great words, even words of ecstatic speech. Some of them can speak in tongues. They had been given great knowledge and wisdom, but honestly, Paul will make clear later, wisdom and knowledge that was a stumbling block for them. It was like *secret* wisdom and knowledge that only the folks on the inside would have—the kind of wisdom and knowledge that keeps you separated from folks, the kind that causes you to say, "I am sorry you don't quite know what we know." They had been given this wisdom and knowledge, and they were satisfied, felt very good about where they were. And Paul wants to introduce them to a *different* knowledge, a *different* wisdom. He wants to take them to the knowledge and wisdom of dissatisfaction. So he mentions the not-yet future at the very beginning.

I am struck by the dialogue that happens between two disciples of John and Jesus in our gospel reading for today. After John the Baptist points these disciples to Jesus as the Passover lamb of God, the one who represents new liberation for the world, the two disciples of John begin following Jesus. Jesus notices it and says, "What are you looking for?" What are you searching for? There must be something new that you are after. John the Baptist isn't enough. There must be some level of dissatisfaction in your life now.

And there must have been because these disciples ask Jesus, "Where are you staying?" With this question they aren't asking whether he is living at 12 Bear Lake Road or 1839 Kings Court (1015 Ruddiman, 3995 Berquist). They are asking a much deeper question, a question about where his life is rooted, what his life and ministry are all about, where that life and ministry are going. Tell us more because we want to go to a new place, these two former disciples of John are saying.

Then Jesus says to them, "Come and see." Come, start a new journey. To follow me is to be taken to some place new. To follow me is to be on a continual road into the future. The journey with Jesus is not a journey of arrival. It is constantly to be on the road to some place new. It is an adventure in which the disciple, John Petty says, trusts the course of the journey to the Master. You've got to be a little dissatisfied to follow Jesus. You've got to be dissatisfied with life as it has always been. You've got to think that there is more. You've got to think that your wisdom and your knowledge are inadequate. You've got to believe that the same old you, the same old culture, the same old politics, the same old economy, the same old order of things is not enough. Jesus is inviting us to come with him into a new future. From the very beginning, he is sending us into a new ending.

Now note what that movement toward a new ending, a new future involves. Jesus says not only, "Come." He says, "Come *and see*." This invitation is first-hand experience. Don't just come. See! Don't just come. Experience! This journey of discipleship is not meant to be

done from a distance. When you stay at a distance, you know what will happen? You will stay a distance. You know what happens to the sixth grade boys who cling to the walls while they are at the dance. They don't dance. And the dance generally doesn't become what it is supposed to become.

Now I know that there are folks who can stay on the sidelines and stay really connected. I know that many people aren't like me, extroverted, ready and eager for every opportunity to social interaction. I am not at all trying to turn introverts into extroverts. But the invitation of Jesus is an invitation to come **and see**. The invitation is to participate in this thing that Jesus is doing. The response of the two disciples was that they "came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day."

That word "remain" is so significant in John. It is used all the time by him. We hear it in other English words like "abide" and "stay." For John, this discipleship thing is about deep involvement. It is the overriding interest of a disciple. It isn't a passing concern. It isn't one among many responsibilities. It isn't the reality you attend to when, you know, you have a little extra time. And it isn't some short-term commitment. It's about the whole of your life. It's about the long haul. It's about staying where Jesus is staying, abiding with him, living with him.

Now please understand that this living, abiding, staying is no lonely endeavor. It doesn't take long in today's gospel for the new disciples of Jesus to be connected to friends. The Gospel of John frequently speaks of how the witnessing of one disciple brings in a new disciple. In our gospel reading for today quickly we are not just hearing about Andrew. We are being led to Peter. To "come and see" is to be connected, is to be joined by others, to share life together. The journey to the end, a new future, that Jesus takes us toward, is one that we are privileged to share with other people. We're moving toward the end together. Together we can be dissatisfied in a good and healthy way. Together we can remind ourselves that we are not the arrived, that we

have much to learn, much wisdom and knowledge to be given apart from our own resources. Together we see where Jesus is staying, what his life tells us about the God “who so loves the world.” Together we get to make mistakes, receive the forgiveness of God and be propelled into a new future. Together we will be strengthened until the very end.

It is ironic that at the very beginning Paul in Corinthians takes us to the end. And maybe it is a bit ironic that at the end of this sermon I am taking you to the beginning, to where it all starts. It begins with a loving call from God himself. It begins with a loving invitation: “Come and see!” Who knows where that invitation is going to lead you? But this we do know. It will be where God is, and lots of folks will be with you. And together we will wait for the end, “the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”