

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday after Trinity, June 2, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 282, 482:1, 511, 486, 485:6.

Lessons: Isaiah 42:5-10, Acts 9:1-30, Matthew 10:16-18.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How does a minister choose a sermon text? For some seasons of the church year, the answer is pretty simple. A sermon text talks about that season of the church year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving.

As a seminary student, I was encouraged to use some kind of pattern, and the use of one of the pericopes (pear-ick'-ca-peas) was recommended as a good pattern. Many Christians have prepared pericopes, or lists of lessons for the church year. The word itself means to cut around, or cut out, as if the lesson was cut out of a particular book of the Bible to include a number of verses. You have two such series in your hymnal. Starting on page 54 you have both a New Testament Epistle lesson and a Gospel lesson. Starting on page 159 that list of suggested lessons is repeated in a two-page summary, along with an Old Testament lesson and a second series of lessons.

So very often I use a pericope to select a sermon text, or a series of sermon texts. Sometimes a listing of periscopes uses several chapters of a book of the Bible spread over several Sundays. Occasionally, I have used a pericope as a starting point for a series. Although every sermon should be able to stand alone in proclaiming both Law and Gospel, today's sermon will serve as a sort of introduction to several sermons on selected texts from 1 and 2 Corinthians and as an introduction to the man called Saint Paul. Today, please listen to

AN INTRODUCTION TO PAUL, GOD'S APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

- 1. He writes to Christians – with all their sins and shortcomings – at Corinth.**
- 2. He is an apostle, called by the Lord.**
- 3. These words are also addressed to us – with all our sins and shortcomings.**

We learn from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, usually called "Acts" that Paul spent about one and one-half years in Corinth as a missionary and a pastor.

Not many of the influential or powerful Corinthians were Christians. We learn that from 1 Corinthians 1:26: *"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."*

There were problems in the congregation in Corinth. Yet Paul writes of them that *"you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."*(1 Corinthians 1:7)

However, love was often absent. As evidence of that we read the famous 'love chapter' 13 of First Corinthians. That begins: *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) After that admonition, he speaks of what true love is and does. *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps*

no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

In the congregation there were differences, factions and cliques. Paul wastes no time addressing this problem, beginning in the tenth verse of the book: *"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"* (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

Paul later tells them they are to take swift action in a terrible case of sexual immorality – of the kind that even the pagans would be ashamed of – which they were allowing to continue without discipline. We read in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"* Paul a few verses later explains the God-pleasing course of action: *"Expel the wicked man from among you."* (1 Corinthians 5:13) The joyous result of this discipline was repentance, as Paul writes in Second Corinthians.

Another problem was that Christians were going to court against Christians. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 *"If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another--and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

All these things – and more – were problems plaguing the Corinthian Christians.

As Paul begins both letters to the Christians at Corinth, he establishes his credentials. We heard that the author of this book of the Bible is *"Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."* In 2 Corinthians 1:1 we read that *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"* is the author.

He is an apostle. He introduces himself by name, and by his station or calling from God.

Because of his history he wrote about himself in 1 Corinthians 15:9 as *"the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."*

He emphasizes his apostleship. He is an apostle by the will of God, not by his own choosing, but by God's choosing. An apostle is "one who was sent out", in this case, by Jesus Christ to do the work of God. Paul had every reason to call himself an apostle, one sent out as an authoritative messenger of Christ. He had not walked and talked with Jesus during the three years of Jesus' ministry on earth, but the risen Jesus had appeared to him and spoken to him on the road to Damascus. He had not been a part of the group that had received Jesus' Easter evening commission, when Jesus said, *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* And with that he breathed on them and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* (John 20:21-23)

However, he had been given the same commission by Jesus at the time of his conversion. Jesus had told him *"I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."* (Acts 26:17-18)

So he is plainly an apostle by the will of God. God's Son, Jesus Christ, had called him to that work just as he had called Paul to a new life from the unbelief in which he had been living.

Paul – then known as Saul – was a horrible man from the perspective of Christians. Among the Jews he was a good man and one whom the Jews ignorantly believed was upholding their faith, but this was really just unbelief in the true God and unbelief in Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer and very Son whom God had sent to mankind to rescue them from their sins, so that everyone who believes in him shall be saved.

How terrible was Paul? He was present at the horrible execution of Stephen. When Stephen was stoned to death, we read that *"Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."* (Acts 8:1)

But, on his way to Damascus, as you heard in our Epistle lesson, God called him away from his previous way of life in a most spectacular way.

He was called by God and then sent to the Gentiles. It is that sending part that makes him an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For an apostle is one "sent out". These apostles were not sent out like salesmen to sell products, but to give something away. It was God's will that they do what they did in proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Savior of all mankind. He was sent not only to be the Savior for the Jews, but also for all Gentiles, yes, even us Gentiles gathered here today.

And what is it that they were to give away? What was the "product" they were apostles for?

It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the knowledge that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews.

In these first words of the letter, Paul emphasizes his divine commission, his divine call.

It was important that Paul establish his authority for at least two reasons. The congregation needed much correction. He would be chastising them for a number of sins and transgressions. And there was opposition to Paul within the congregation. Some were even attacking him and his ministry.

Can't you just hear people saying 'Who are you to admonish us?' 'What or who gave you the right to talk to us that way?' meaning the way Paul admonishes the congregation especially in First Corinthians. When Paul spoke and later wrote to them, they had better pay attention, or they would be guilty of refusing to listen to God himself. One does not disregard an ambassador of a great king.

These two letters are addressed "to the church". This is the assembly that God had gathered together, all those in Corinth who through the Gospel have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ. They—and we – are called saints. Saints are Christians, those whom the Holy Ghost has set apart from the unbelieving world and brought into a new fellowship with Jesus.

As you will see from coming sermons, this will affect the way Paul speaks to them. It has the same effect on us as we relate to one another within the body of Christ.

With the Corinthian Christians, we can rejoice: *"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Yes, it is by the grace of God that you have been washed and sanctified and justified because of what Jesus Christ did for you! Paul, one of God's saints, writes to you, too. Hear the Word of God, repent daily, and rejoice that you, too, are among *"those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Corinthians 1:2-3) Amen.