

**A New Year and New Life for a New You
based on 1Cor. 1, David Jahnke, 1/7/18**

I am going to do a sermon series on at least Paul's second letter to the Corinthians which is called First Corinthians in the Bible. Thought I would start by confusing you. Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 5 that he wrote to them earlier about something. That letter is no longer with us, unfortunately. But the ongoing correspondence points to serious, ongoing issues in that church (as there were in all of Paul's churches.) And yet he starts his letter to the Corinthians like this.

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So despite all of the Corinthians' problems, Paul starts by reminding them that they have already been sanctified in Christ Jesus; and that God called them to be saints. And whatever God called into being would come to fruition. And that means wonderful things are in store for them.

And the same goes for all of us who have our own issues. I know I do. And if we think we do not have issues, that is a huge issue! There is almost nothing worse than self-righteousness. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us!" said John in his first letter. But even as we awaken to our problematic patterns, they are very hard to shake.

So we should be filled with hope when God's Word says that we have already been set apart by Christ from all of that...crud. The saying is true that, "Crud happens!" But it is not the rule and it does not reign over us. It is not who we or others really are and it need not overcome us.

The Psalmist said we have all been wonderfully and beautifully made by God in the womb where divine abilities were implanted in us. And ever since, God has been making you holy, developing those miraculous gifts by way of the Holy Spirit.

Now you may not feel so holy which is why Paul hammers home how and why this is true. Continuing now at v. 8:

8 God will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by God you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul is probably implying that none of us are particularly faithful, strong or glad to follow Jesus as we should. But that is much less important than the fact that God is faithful and strong and God will strengthen us and bring us back to Jesus and His sanctifying Spirit time and again!

I was going through a dry and dark period spiritually recently. I was still able to pray and was reading God's Word a little here and there, mostly for work. But things just kind of kept declining. When I seemed to be at my wit's end, one night I picked up my Bible and started reading Paul's letter to the Corinthians. And I was more focused than usual and zipped through a few chapters and the words were jumping off of the page. And when I paused to pray, I was flooded with a gentle sound in my brain of wind or waves and with a feeling of peace. And all of the crud went away.

I bring this up as a tangible example of God's favor. I did nothing to deserve this. Quite the opposite. But God chooses not to hold things against us. He pushes them aside, wipes them away and welcomes us back into his presence.

It is the devil who hold things against us and tempts us to hold things against others. In the Old Testament, he is the accuser; the one who insists that we are not faithful enough, good enough, or wise enough for God. Satan keeps our minds on our and others' sins in order to devalue and exalt so that we despair and become become self-righteous and thus condemn ourselves and others.

Paul answers that at the end of the first chapter. In the middle of the chapter, Paul wrote about the quote-unquote foolishness of the cross where God was devalued and condemned in order to commune with and exalt and save those devalued and condemned by the world. I will read, starting at verse 25:

²⁵God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. ²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to judge the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to judge the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world...

So how will you see yourself and God in 2018? Are you so wise and strong that you do not particularly need a God of compassion? Do you feel lowly and foolish and condemned by a God who would never stoop to your level? Or do you acknowledge that you are sometimes lowly and foolish...but that God has chosen you and will meet you wherever you are and lift you up time and again into new life.

How will we see others in 2018? Three things happened lately that lead me to address how we see our elderly. Someone brought up a couple of weeks ago how blessed our congregation was by our elderly and vice-versa. And then I read in Paul about God strengthening us to the end and thought of those who are closer to the end than others, especially after spending time with a friend who is worried she is close to the end. Lastly I read this from the great spiritual write Parker Palmer who has a new book coming out. In a preview, he writes:

2018 is young, but I'm not! This year, I turn 79. So I wrote a book called "On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity & Getting Old." This is my 10th book, and I finally found a topic I know something about! I wrote it for all who are growing old(er)—which includes pretty much everyone who's alive, as far as I can tell.

It's also a book for elders in a culture that often devalues them and their many years of contributing to the common good, with much more left to give. It's a book that says, "Old is just another word for nothing left to lose! Get feisty and take creative risks! We and the world need each other."

I just want all of our elderly to know how much we love and appreciate you. We would be able to do very little in this church without you. And we will always be here for you, just you have been here for us.

And to the younger in our congregation, how might we contribute more deeply to the common good that Parker mentions? One of Paul's primary concerns with his churches and the world was how sin leads to division in communities. Paul is looking down in dismay about how individualistic and divided our country has become. Our nation became great not only because of a strong individual work ethic but due to commitment to the common good among various nationalities and faith traditions. And because all of our blessings come through both hard work and God's grace and help from others, the blessings are not just for our sake but for all.

It is time to put into practice the gospel truth that God is wondrously present to the lowly and calling us to join his blessing them and his desire to bless us through them. We have many programs in this regard but the one thing I want to bring to your attention today is the MLK day of service on Jan. 15th. We talked at session Tuesday night about how for almost a century, our church has been of uniting this community and that we need to maintain the lead in this regard. Let's keep up the momentum from Crop, scouting for food, Heifer and more and show people what following Jesus' wondrous love and care for all can do for our world. And God's people say...