

God is Faithful  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9  
January 15, 2023  
First Presbyterian, Luling

In these weeks between Epiphany and Lent, we're going to focus on the lectionary readings from First Corinthians. That gives us six weeks, and we won't get all the way through it, but we can dig into the first few chapters.

Before we dig in, we need to know a little about the people that received this letter—who they were, where they were, what is happening with them. Corinth was a seaport town. They were located on a narrow strip of land and had a port a few miles to the north and another a few miles to the south. There was a lot of sea traffic and a lot of land traffic, to transport all those goods into the interior. Like any port city, Corinth had a transient population—people who weren't from there and who weren't likely to stick around for very long. This is a recipe for all sorts of temptations, and Corinth abounded in temptations. Corinth also abounded people with all kinds of religious backgrounds, all kinds of places of worship, all kinds of ideas floating around. People were accustomed to interacting with people who were different than they were, were accustomed to talking about religious ideas and experimenting with religious practice.<sup>1</sup>

The congregation that Paul was writing to was mostly Gentiles, though there may have been a few Jewish people who had fled from Roman persecution elsewhere. The order of letters between the congregation and Paul is a bit up in the air. What we have in 1 and 2 Corinthians are apparently some of Paul's letters—more than two but not all of them, and they seem to be a bit scrambled in order. We don't have the church's letters or messages to Paul, obviously. Paul has heard some reports about the Corinthians that have disturbed him, and they have written to him with some questions about troubles within the church, and thus he sends this letter to them from Ephesus.<sup>2</sup>

The form of the letter is typical for ancient letters. It starts with an identification of the author and the recipient. Then there's a greeting, Paul's typical one of "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And then there's a paragraph of thanksgiving, tailored to the church that receives it. Galatians is the only letter of Paul's in the New Testament that omits

---

<sup>1</sup> Information in this paragraph from workingpreacher.com, Dwight Peterson, 2008.  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-1-corinthians-11-9-2>

<sup>2</sup> Information in this paragraph from HarperCollins Study Bible, pgs 1932-33.

the thanksgiving paragraph, and he is pretty steamed at the Galatians. It seems like Paul subscribed to the “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all,” at least in the thanksgiving section. He’s careful to compliment the Corinthians on their speech and knowledge, and the abundance of their spiritual gifts. Those things will show up later, as Paul is not completely pleased with the way they’re using that speech and knowledge and those gifts. Paul’s thanksgivings are directed, in every case, to things he is thankful for about the church, and whatever strengthens the church. They’re less personal and more toward and for the community.

Paul’s thanksgivings are about the church, but they’re even more, and really, about God. Put on your grammar hats for a second and listen to these verbs in particular. Those who are sanctified; called to be saints; grace that has been given you; you have been enriched; testimony has been strengthened; you are not lacking, you were called into fellowship....all of those passive voice descriptions of the Corinthians have an implied subject: God.<sup>3</sup> God has sanctified them—made them holy. God has called them to be saints. God has given them grace. God has enriched them in speech and knowledge. God has strengthened their testimony. God has made sure they were not lacking in any spiritual gift. God has called them into the fellowship. Why does Paul not just say this? It could reflect a typical Jewish avoidance of saying the name of God, but Paul doesn’t always avoid it. It could just be Paul using four words where one would be enough. He tends to do that. He makes it pretty explicit in verse 9, where we stopped reading today: God is faithful. You can almost hear the parentheses there: (and you are not faithful, my dear Corinthians).

God is faithful. God calls and sanctifies and gives, even when the Corinthians are not faithful, even when they have messed up considerably. God is faithful.

I was trying to think of something in my life that has been faithful. I don’t want to equate Daisy with divine faithfulness, because I’m fairly certain hers has at least a little to do with food and treats. But she is a remarkably forgiving and faithful critter.

And then I thought of our freezer. Equating a freezer’s faithfulness with God is probably even less of a good idea than the dog, but here I go. We received the freezer after we had been married for two years, which makes it 23 years old. We have not been particularly nice to it—except for 7 of those years, it’s been in various garages, which can’t be the nicest place for a freezer to have to work. If

---

<sup>3</sup> Idea from Anchor Bible Commentary, 1 Corinthians, Orr and Walther, pg. 144.

there's something you're supposed to do to maintain a freezer, well, we haven't done it. It doesn't require defrosting, but we don't do anything other than shove food in it, and take food out of it. And it just keeps running. Nothing on it has ever broken. It keeps the food good and cold. The door seals up well. It's a faithful freezer, no matter what we do or don't do to it.

God is of course way more than a freezer. God is faithful. God gives the Corinthians what they need. God gives us what we need. It's up to the Corinthians how they use those gifts, and they teeter on the edge of using them unfaithfully. It's up to us how we use the gifts God has given us. I hope we aren't teetering on that edge. God is faithful. God has called us together. God has set us apart as holy, as sanctified. Goodness knows that's not something we could do ourselves. God has enriched us in fellowship and compassion. God has called us into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord. God is faithful. Let us be so, too.