

The Rock: 08-29-2021**The Gift series**

First reading: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Title: In weakness and fear

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (Pt.2)

Theme:

Big or small, full of the gifts or only having a few evident -a church is only successful if it is on task with its mission and assignment God has given her.

Introduction:

I remember the 2001 football season, when a very young Tom Brady took over for Drew Bledsoe. One would never had known then that a kid from Michigan who had carried a clip board for an entire year would unseat one of the best QB's NE had ever had.

But he did. Even that isn't what strikes me from that year, and it wasn't even that they went on to beat the Rams. What struck me was how they came onto the field.

For the first time in Superbowl history, they were not introduced individually, but simple as "The New England Patriots".

The entire team ran onto the field together. They recognized that even though the individual talents on that team were important, they knew the more important fact, that the sum total of all those talents working together was what made them great, what made them a team.

Alone, they were very good. Together, they were Superbowl champs. As we continue one more week here in chapter two, that is something to remember about the gifts, as well as a healthy church community.

While we may be good as individuals and our set of giftings, we are much better together and are able to fulfill the call of God by recognizing the vital importance of being a Church which joins as one body Sunday after Sunday, in order to strengthen each other.

So, that's why we ended last week with the primary mission of the church in front of us. That it is to glorify God, and build each other up.

The Story:

Paul had written to this church in Corinth to answer questions and to sort out the mistakes and sin that had simply taken over in their community.

He did so, we discover here, in three ways, and that will be our focus this morning, as we revisit our text from last week:

1-He kept his message simple and focused.
(Vs. 2)

2-He did so even though he was afraid.
(Vs. 3)

3-He was able to do so by the power of the Spirit. (Vs. 4)

This very simple outline and the truth it holds drove people to faith, not in Paul or his preaching, but to Jesus and a saving knowledge -through grace.

In other words, his preaching of the word brought people to Jesus!

It's important too, to notice that Paul was up against the same type of issues we are confronted with today.

Cultural conformity and cultural capitulation. Paul stood out against all these eloquent Greek Philosophers who spoke so well while saying so very little. But everyone loved to hear them speak and drone on about nothing.

Paul was simple in what he said and how he said it:

1- Simple:

-1 Corinthians 2:2 (ESV)

"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Paul had no desire to make things vague and complicated to understand. The last thing Paul wanted was to be seen as just another guy coming through town with a "new thing" to add to all the other things people believed.

That would have been to give in to the culture which said believe whatever you want, just don't tell me that one way to believe is the only way to be right.

You see, Paul was actually dealing with the same type of environment we do. A pluralistic and secular culture, self-centered and ready to believe anything which validates personal thinking and opinion.

To capitulate to the culture becomes very dangerous. Not only does it mean forsaking the pure gospel for a watered-down version, it can also mean settling for the "status quo".

In other words, that what we have is good enough, especially here in New England. After all its hard ground, and we are hard headed independent people.

Anyway, the saying is heard at times, that if your church is bigger than 50, let's say, well you must be doing something wrong. Because big churches are somehow compromising the gospel.

Or, you are only successful if you are really big. Both settling for the notion that this is "good enough". Afterall this is really good for New England.

Really? Do we really believe that is how God thinks? Oh-it's New England and well they are a bit hard-headed, so Jesus I don't think the Holy Spirit can work there.

I got news for you -He doesn't think that way as we know, and we shouldn't either! I explain church health and growth this way:

What does a healthy apple tree produce?

Apples, that's what. The healthier the tree, the more apples you will have. So, I leave that with us all to think on when it comes to how a church grows.

Deciding to preach Jesu Christ and Him crucified brings results. Big or small, the church is successful if it is fulfilling its God given assignment.

Yet, we can't escape the fact that healthy trees produce more fruit. Growth

and multiplication will always happen in a healthy churches. Why? Because they are outward focused, driven by vision and by the developing of disciples who go out into the work place and wider world with the Gospel.

Paul's goal was always healthy churches. He didn't go to Corinth with a technique or some latest greatest sales pitch. He went in the power of the Spirit, keeping it simple. But it wasn't easy.

He was stepping into a culture which had no real understanding of or any real use for the exclusive claims of the Gospel message.

It's one of the reasons he always kept it clear and simple, but showing us a glimpse of his very human side, not often seen, he tells us

2- He is coming in a bit of fear:

-1 Corinthians 2:3 (ESV)

"And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling"

He was stepping into a new thing, in a new place. And that new place, as I have said, didn't like new things which challenged how they had always thought and did things.

Listen - Bringing a counter-cultural message is always unsettling. Remember the quote from Begg last week?

"Until we are prepared to be thought foolish in the eyes of the world, it is unlikely we will know the power of God being displayed in our lives and ministries."

-Begg Pg. 159

Paul was not some spiritual superman, somehow above being afraid and unsettled not only by change, but by stepping into a brand new environment, which is hostile toward the Gospel message.

It is never about NOT being afraid, but rather about having the courage to stand, to hold the line. Learning how to manage your fear, as Paul did.

How? He brought them into the light and truth of who led him. Obedience to the call of God and the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit reminds us that He never promises ease, he never says life will be devoid of suffering or discomfort.

Frankly, it is my belief that a great deal of the problems we face today are not having to do with suffering and discomfort, but rather the lack of.

Now I'm not advocating that we go looking for trouble, but we need to understand that life is hard, and sometimes the only safe space you can find is at the foot of the cross through tears and sometime in pain and suffering.

To think that life is only good if we never suffer creates a dangerous outlook on life. What we are promised by God is peace and protection in the midst of it all.

I leave that with you as this is something we wrestle with as individuals, and also ultimately as a church community.

As we look to build into the next generation, making life-long followers of Jesus, we must be prepared to engage our world with the gospel, even though we are unsettled in doing so.

Let's be honest, it is difficult to stand alone (sometimes) in a culture which demands absolute submission to its way of thinking.

Paul stepped into the arena (remember this from a few weeks back) if ideas and idols. He did not hide himself away in the hopes that the culture would walk through his front door.

He set up shop as a tent making evangelist in Corinth with one message as he fixed tents for people:

-1 Corinthians 2:2c (ESV)

"Jesus Christ and him crucified."

That's the message, that one stringed banjo will always play the same tune, but how we play it will change. It must change.

In Corinth, Paul was dealing with a whole new thing. Most commentators put him there around 51-52. Right about the time of the Isthmus games, the precursor to the Olympics.

So, the city was full of athletes who spent their life in physical training, and who, by the way didn't get put up in the downtown Corinthian Hyatt Hotel.

They stayed in guess what? Tents. So Paul set up shop right in the midst of that, broke out his sewing needle and hung out his tent maker sign, and went to work.

Unlike the traveling salesmen of his day, he simply allowed the Holy Spirit to lead, gift and anoint his words as he was faithful to preach the simple message of salvation, even though he was afraid (terrified).

That God, in Jesus of Nazareth, has reconciled the world to Himself. Alone in a crowd, not neatly tucked away in safety, but in the midst of it all, he preached this Jesus.

A Jewish carpenter, crucified by the Romans, but was now alive again and ascended to heaven as Lord and King. A title given only to Caesar, but Paul boldly declared belonged only to Jesus.

As an aside, this is the real reason why the Holy Spirit is given. To bear witness to this truth. Not so we can have all kinds of gifts.

A healthy church will have them and operate in them, but that is never to be the primary focus or reason as to why someone seeks the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Looking for it simply to get the gift of tongues, I believe is one of the main reasons why we don't see the baptism much anymore.

But that is for a later teaching.

Back to Paul. If we are honest, we also will be fearful and trembling in the midst of main street USA with a hostile crowd all around, preaching such a narrow and exclusive message.

If you think you wouldn't be, check your pride. I've been studying and preaching

for a long time, and I am never so nervous as when I am about to speak somewhere or step into this pulpit on Sunday morning to preach the Gospel.

I've been to college campuses and alone in a room with students who know nothing of the Bible and in some are antagonistic toward it.

I am always confident in Christ, but every time I go before them in fear and trembling. It is not something that is easy, but it is something we all are called to, at some level.

I challenge you to be prayerful, asking God to show you how he wants to use you beyond these walls. Not just here on Sunday, that's important, but outside of here too.

Even in fear and trembling as God's missionary where God has set him down on main street Corinth, Paul held the line.

It's how he functioned everywhere he went. Not in his own strength, but in the anointing and the power of the Holy Spirit.

All of us are called to missions, as frightening as that seems. But really, 95% of us are called to missions right here in our own back yard, the local mission field.

It's a scary thing to think about because it's not "over there" where ever that over there is. Rather its right here, amongst your neighbors, friends, co-worker, and enemies.

Paul kept it simple, and being a human being he held the line in obedience even though he was afraid, and he did it because of and:

3- in the power of the Holy Spirit:

-1 Corinthians 2:4 (ESV)

"...and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power..."

One of the problems with the Corinthians was that they seemed to be all about the bells and whistles, and not too much about the transformative power of God in their lives. The hard work of self-reflection and working out their salvation.

Here comes this Paul, a little Jewish Rabbi who has begun to turn the known world on its ear, yet it seems was not the best of public speakers.

He says so himself when he is trying to lead this group away from themselves and

their cravings for following the next best thing:

-2 Corinthians 11:5-6 (ESV)

"Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things."

He preaches and teaches for the purpose of making sure our hearts would be in the right place. So that we worship properly AND so we engage the unbelieving world in the correct way.

Jesus Christ -Him crucified.

In the midst of all that, we find the gifts God has given to the church are for our mutual edification and to drive us to want, for His sake, to reach the world and our own little corner of it with the gospel.

It is in that context that we see the gifts as a means to an end, not the end itself, as if they are for our personal enjoyment or some kind of badge to wear.

In the middle of this culture, which cannot make up its mind on a "story" to believe, we need to Holy Spirit. His power and His gift is in order to reach

this post-gospel, post-church culture
with the only story that makes sense.

The story of the Bible, and How God the
Father, sent God the Son to save us.