

Faith is a member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, a very old institution, so old few people remember why “Missouri” is a part of our name. With over 170 years of history, it’s hard for this old dog to do new tricks. And that’s a problem. Sure, sin today looks pretty much the same as it did in 1847; and thankfully, the grace that saves sinners from death is still the same. But the world has changed, and the people we’re talking to about Jesus have changed too. This morning we’re going to talk about how the Lord is not done building his church yet and what that means for you and me in our walk with God and with one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### 1<sup>st</sup> CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

**Paul, called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, <sup>2</sup>To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours: <sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, <sup>6</sup>even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup>who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The Corinthian church was fraught with problems: Despite the people’s conversion from paganism, many men still fell for the temptation of the temple prostitutes. God had endowed the people with gifts to build up the body of Christ, but they became a source of pride for them. In addition, the people had taken up loyalties to different men based on who had baptized them instead of to Jesus who had saved them all.

It was with these things in mind Paul began his letter with the words, **“Paul, called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (1:1).** He declared

his authority: he was called; he was an apostle; and God willed it. So buckle in and hold on to your hats because he's about to set your ears on fire! Indeed, over the next few pages he had some harsh words for the church about how they were not living the faith that Jesus died for.

But before he dressed them down, he wrote, **"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours" (1:2).**

What a great reminder, that this thing called church is **"the church of God."** It does not belong to any person, corporation, or government. But it belongs to God alone. Paul wrote that everyone had been **"sanctified in Christ,"** that they were **"saints by calling."** These were words of assurance, words of promise. God's in charge, and we can rest in him. Alleluia!

But how many times have we acted as though the church was my own personal property, that there was something here that belongs to me? Paul's words are a good reminder that this church is **"the church of God."**

Paul continued, saying, **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3).** In Romans 5, Paul expanded on the idea behind this blessing of grace and peace from God. He wrote, **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).**

God's grace and peace—his gifts—the essence of our identity as Christians—the source of our sense of life now unto eternity—all this because of faith, faith in Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day, in whose name we are baptized. **"Grace to you and peace"**: With these words Paul laid the foundation for the remainder of his letter.

He wrote, **"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus" (1:4).** I cannot emphasize enough the power of

what Paul was saying to the church as he told the people about his thankfulness for their salvation and fellowship.

We often idolize Paul for all the letters which he wrote to the churches. After all, if it wasn't for those letters, the Christian faith may have ended as quickly as it started as a blip on the screen of Jewish messianic sects. But the letters were only the outcome of something much bigger. Consider how Paul had such a large network of churches with which he could interact. And think about all the leaders, the men and women with whom he worked, who would direct the body of Christ under persecution during his lifetime and for hundreds of years thereafter. Relationships: Paul's relationships with hundreds, probably thousands of people, made the Christian faith accessible to the world.

We see hints of that here when he told the church he thanked God for them every day. Paul was a team player. In his 13-letters, Paul wrote about his relationships with all kinds of people: Lay people and pastors, laborers, slaves and the rich—Paul made and nurtured relationships all along his way.

That's what we're doing here at Faith. We have a long history of broken relationships with pastors and members. But we're done with that. We're building relationships anew, and we're going to nurture them.

Under Pastor Cano's leadership we have begun building relationships with the 91-families that attended the Toy Drive. We gave their 300 to 400 children toys, then we hosted them at our food distribution outreach two weeks ago, and we're inviting them to our Valentine's day celebration hosted by our schools. We're talking to them. We're praying for them. We're ministering to them. We're loving them into the Kingdom of God.

My earliest memory is from a Christmas a long time ago. I was three years old. It was Christmas Eve, and I was so excited I got up in the middle of the night, creeping into the living room that I might see Santa Clause! The lights were still on, on the tree. The tinsel shimmered in the blue, red, and green light. It was in the glow of this Christmas magic I proceeded to unwrap every single gift under the tree. I remember this moment because of the hysterical screech Mom made when she came into the front room to find me knee deep in wrapping paper. That Christmas I learned that I cannot possess that which does not belong to me.

I perceive that some of us feel at least a little bit concerned that our new Spanish speaking friends are going to steal our church away from us. But this church does not belong to us; it is **“the church of God.”** Here the Lord has given us everything we need for our salvation, but he also has provided everything necessary for the sanctification of our whole neighborhood.

Indeed, the only threat to Faith Lutheran Church is Faith Lutheran Church, that we would be afraid or angry, that we would withhold fellowship from other people because they do not conform to our expectations.

St. Paul finished this section, saying, **“in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, <sup>6</sup>even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup>who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:5-9).**

Friends in Christ, nothing can steal away from you the love of Christ or the means of grace. Like the church in Corinth, God has confirmed in us the testimony of Christ, that is, that he loves you so much that he has chosen to call you his son, his daughter. We lack nothing; God has gifted us with everything we need to gift our neighbors with this same inheritance. **“God is faithful.”** Please say it with me. (God is faithful.)

This week let us pray that the Lord would confirm in our hearts his fellowship with us.

This week let us pray that the Lord would give us success in loving our Hispanic neighbors into his Kingdom.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.