

Day 1: Becoming Who We Are

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Devotion

*"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ
Jesus and called to be holy"*

1 Corinthians 1:2

Frederick Buechner, a minister and writer, tells the parable of Lord George - a debauched and wicked man - who falls in love with a wonderful girl. In order to win her love, he covers his bloated features with the mask of a saint. The girl is deceived and becomes his bride, and they live together happily until a woman from Lord George's past turns up to expose him for the scoundrel he is. She challenges him to take off the mask. Sadly, Lord George takes it off, and behold beneath the saint's mask is the face of the saint he has become, by wearing it in love.

That parable says a lot about how we grow in holiness. We grow in holiness by doing obedient things. It's like becoming a parent. When a newborn arrives to first-time parents, they don't necessarily feel like parents. But then they do parenting things. They change nappies, set up doctor visits, and sit up through the night with a sick child. They act like parents. And it isn't long before parenting soaks down to the core of their identity.

Holiness is like that. Paul tells us in this passage that in Jesus Christ we are given the identity of a saint. We are "sanctified in Christ Jesus." Our holiness is first of all God's gift. But then holiness also becomes a goal. We are "called to be holy." Are you responding to that call? Live out who you are in Christ.

Prayer

Lord, we are a people set apart for your service. Help us to grow in holiness - not so that we become proud of our goodness, but so that we may be humble in your service. Amen.

Day 2: As One

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Devotion

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...be perfectly united in mind and thought."

1 Corinthians 1:10

In this passage, Paul goes after divisions in the church that were emerging as a result of factionalism. People were beginning to ascribe their loyalty to particular human leaders at the expense of the collective unity that they shared in Christ Jesus.

The reality is that the church today is prone to make the same mistake. Paul's prayer into this situation is that the church would be free from disagreement and division, but instead be perfectly united in mind and thought. In saying this, Paul is not calling for uniformity but unity. There is plenty of room for diversity in the church, but the exhortation is that our unity in Christ and what He has done for us together would trump all other differences and preferences, which seem petty in comparison.

Will you fight for, and celebrate, the unity that we share with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, keep us from becoming more loyal to, and idolatrous of, human leaders than we are followers and worshippers of you. Keep us from disunity and division, rather may we be one – just as you and the Father are one. Amen.

Day 3: At The Risk of Sounding Foolish

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Devotion

"God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

1 Corinthians 1:21

If you have ever tried to learn a new language, you would be familiar with the nervous, self-conscious feeling that people are laughing at you. It's a normal part of the process to make lots of funny (and sometimes embarrassing) mistakes when trying to communicate in a foreign tongue. You learn quickly to laugh at yourself and not take yourself too seriously.

Today's reading isn't about language bloopers but the seeming foolishness of the message itself. For thousands of years the world tried to find God through various philosophies and religions, but "the world through its wisdom did not [come to] know him." No one can know God unless He reveals Himself. And God does that through the good news of Jesus.

"We preach Christ crucified," said the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. With scorn and laughter the experts of that day said, "God on a cross? How powerless!"

People scorn and laugh at this message today too. But we mustn't think our neighbours can come to know God simply by what they see in us. We must share the message of Jesus and the cross, because for those whom God is calling it speaks of the power and wisdom of God. Will you take the risk of sounding foolish today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, many people today don't want to hear that you are the only way to God. Give us extra courage to speak your name to our neighbours. In your name we pray. Amen.

Day 4: Wisdom and Strength

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Devotion

"God chose the foolish things of the world ... [and] the weak things of the world"

1 Corinthians 1:27

In 1978 Pyotr, a Christian teenager, was drafted into the Soviet Army. It wasn't long before everyone in his military unit knew he was a "churchman".

One day an officer demanded that Pyotr publicly denounce his faith. He refused. The officer pointed his handgun at Pyotr's head: "Denounce your God right now, or I'll shoot!" Pyotr quietly closed his eyes and prayed. A gun's click broke the silence. A misfire? A moment later, another click! Pyotr trembled, but he remained faithful to Jesus. The upset officer realised that his cruel game wouldn't work. He threw his gun back in its holster and yelled at Pyotr to get out of his office.

When Pyotr remembers this story today, he doesn't think he was such a brave or committed Christian. Somehow in God's grace he managed to remain faithful. Pyotr was one of the "weak things of the world" that God uses "to shame the strong."

We know the limits of our flesh and intellect. But in Christ, God chooses us, the weak and often foolish people, to be his disciples. By God's grace we become His strong and wise followers.

It's not up to us; it's up to God. We have no right to boast. We can only praise our almighty Lord for the miracle of transformation--and humbly ask him for more strength and wisdom in our daily walk of faith.

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Prayer

Almighty God, we are weak, but you are strong. Please make us your faithful disciples. Give us the strength and wisdom we need in order to serve you faithfully. Amen.

Day 5: Powerful Preaching

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Devotion

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might...rest on...God's power."

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

We live in an age where we have easy access to some exceptional, world-class Bible teachers and preachers. Within a matter of clicks, we can be listening to an anointed man or woman of God powerfully expounding a Bible passage and calling the listeners to repent and obey.

Sometimes when we hear excellent preaching we can begin to think that the power is in their persuasion, their charisma, their intellect or their passion. Paul reminds us today that even if you took those things away – even if the preaching is not characterised by wisdom or eloquence but instead weakness and fear – the power remains. Why? Because the ability of the preach to transform lives never lay in the person delivering the message but rather the person the message was pointing towards.

The same is true for you as well. Instead of focussing on our weaknesses as the vessel delivering the Gospel, let us focus instead on the immeasurable power of the One we are proclaiming. God can, and does, use the weak to accomplish His mighty purposes – so that the Spirit's power may be on full display!

Prayer

Lord, may your Spirit direct and lead us. Thank you for calling each of us to be used by you. May we become demonstrations of your Spirit's power in us. Amen.