

Pastor's Message
August 2, 2020

Hi Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Hope you are all finding ways to stay cool during these “lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer.”

This week is the first part of our five-week sermon series on Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Throughout these next four weeks, let us listen to the words of Paul letter, as if this letter was written to our group of friends, to our group of colleagues or to our group of sisters and brothers in Christ to see what advice Paul has to offer for us in these challenging times.

Hope to see you tomorrow.

God's Peace!

Pastor Denise

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

The reading this morning is from the 1st chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

1¹⁻² I, Paul, have been sent on a special mission by the Messiah, Jesus, planned by God himself. I write this to God's congregation in Corinth, and to believers all over Achaia province. May all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father and the Master, Jesus Christ, be yours! Timothy, someone you know and trust, joins me in this greeting.

The Rescue

3-5 All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort—we get a full measure of that, too.

6-7 When we suffer for Jesus, it works out for your healing and salvation. If

we are treated well, given a helping hand and encouraging word, that also works to your benefit, spurring you on, face forward, unflinching. Your hard times are also our hard times. When we see that you're just as willing to endure the hard times as to enjoy the good times, we know you're going to make it, no doubt about it.

8-11 We don't want you in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this came down on us in Asia province. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally—not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead! And he did it, rescued us from certain doom. *And* he'll do it again, rescuing us as many times as we need rescuing. You and your prayers are part of the rescue operation—I don't want you in the dark about that either. I can see your faces even now, lifted in praise for God's deliverance

of us, a rescue in which your prayers
played such a crucial part.
Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.
AMEN

Listen to the words of this prayer written by St. Francis Of Assisi

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness only light,
And where there's sadness ever joy.

O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved, as to love, with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, Lord,
It is in giving of ourselves that we receive,
And in dying we are born to eternal life.

This morning we move from the
ancient Biblical story of Job to the

story of the emerging church in
Corinth. A story we hear through the

words of Paul as he writes what Biblical scholars think was at least his fourth letter to the Corinthians.

We have little to no documentation about what had transpired between his first letter to the people of Corinth and this one known as 2nd Corinthians, but what we do know is that whatever had happened had caused strained relationships and hard feelings between Paul and the church in Corinth. Paul is now, reaching out to the people of Corinth to come to terms with what had gone awry and to work toward healing and reconciliation.

The opening of this letter is different from that of Paul's other recorded letters as it doesn't start out with Paul's usual thanksgiving for the people that he is writing to. Instead Paul begins this letter with a blessing and a prayer, as Paul states: May all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father and the Master, Jesus Christ, be yours.

He goes on to call on the God of all mercy and consolation – to heal us (that is the broken and strained

relationship between Paul and the church of Corinth) and asks God to console us so that we may console others.

As I hear these words from Paul – the words of the Prayer of St. Francis that I spoke just a few moments ago come to mind as perhaps the unspoken intro to this letter to the Corinthians, as Paul is taking the risk of offering an olive branch to his estranged brothers and sisters in Corinth.

Paul is writing to the Corinthians to repair the strained relationships that have sprung up from harsh and hurtful words that have been spoken, from false accusations, and from misunderstood actions.

And Paul writes to acknowledge these hurtful actions as a first step in an effort to resurrect these damaged and dying relationships, and to build a new future together.

And so Paul is first reaching out to the Lord, to empower him and the church of Corinth to be the channel of God's peace. To give all of them

the will and the skill to heal their differences and where there is conflict that has resulted in hatred, let them find and let them be to one another the healing power of God's love.

Paul asks God that he may receive God's forgiveness and consolation for what has happened so that he may then console others.

In this first part of this letter Paul emphasizes the need for consolation. That is the act of entering into someone's life to walk with them or to carry them through their darkest valley, by first of all stepping into their lives as a non-anxious presence and acknowledging their pain and suffering and then offering them hope

Quite the opposite of what Job's friends did – yes they entered into Job's life and at first they listened to Job's lament, but they grew weary and frustrated and when they spoke, their words were not words of consolation, but Job's friends spoke words of accusation. They may have intended to offer hope, but they did not.

In addition to the challenges that this pandemic places in front of us each and every day. We live in a time of great division, a time when people have chosen sides, a time when it is easier to turn away than to turn toward one another to work out or at least understand the basis of our differences. This does not only happen in our backyard, but also in the places where we work, where we play and where we worship.

Throughout these next four weeks, let us listen to the words of Paul letter, as if this letter was written to our group of friends, to our group of colleagues or to our group of sisters and brothers in Christ to see what advice Paul has to offer for us in these challenging times.

Beginning with this text where he first prays that those with whom he differs may be blessed with all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father and the Master, Jesus Christ. He begins the conversation not only with the acknowledgement that God is with all of them in this dispute and that God has is not about choosing sides, but that God will bestow on all his children, no matter their opinions, or

their alliances, or the actions, God will bless all the people of this conflicted group with divine gifts and benefits.

And then after reminding us that we are all God's children who are divinely blessed, Paul also reminds the Corinthians of who and where God is as he states: God comes alongside us when we go through hard times. Just like Job, God was with him all along. And God is with us in the midst of our broken and strained relationships with our loved ones, with our co-workers and with our brothers and sisters of all faiths. God is with us, that is all of us.

And then just as God has walked by our side in our time of need, God brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.

Lord, make me, make us a channel of your peace. God's peace that is anchored in love, God's peace that is beyond our comprehension and God's peace that is the way of God's divine kingdom that we pray may one day come here on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord, make us be that channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred let us (be the ones) to bring your love.

Where there's despair in life, let us (be the ones) to bring hope.

Where there is darkness, let us (be the ones) to bring your light,

And where there's sadness, let us (be the ones) to bring your joy.

This is the work that God has called us, Jesus has commanded us and the Holy Spirit has empowered us to do.

AMEN