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# 2019 PASTORAL REPORT

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## ***“Enjoy the Blessed Relationship between a Church and its Pastor”***

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### **1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother, <sup>2</sup> To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs 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 to you by Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, <sup>6</sup> even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, <sup>7</sup> so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (NKJV<sup>TM</sup>)

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Dear children of God, who look to Christ as the Lamb of God,

So I was invited to join the Honor Society in high school. To be honest, it was almost embarrassing to join it. Everybody knew it was a dysfunctional organization--at least at my high school. Very few students were involved and the leaders of the organization certainly did not lead. The advisor was a super nice teacher. But maybe a little too nice? So it happened--when I became a senior--I was elected to be the president of the Honor Society. I knew I would have my hands full. Thankfully I had some other friends in the organization who helped me spearhead things to get it much more organized. In fact we got things organized to the point that we asked the school board to give us the financial means to allow us to go on a field trip to Seattle. For a small farming community that was a big deal. And we were able to go there to take in a rare educational exhibit from China. Everybody who went, I think, had a great time and remembered it fondly. But that doesn't mean everything went along smoothly!

Every organization has some dysfunctionality in it. An organization is a group of sinful people joined together. There will be pride; there will be greed; there will be laziness; there will be dishonesty; there will be hypocrisy; there will be even senselessness. So no matter how good an organization is, there will be problems. It can come up in a club like Honor Society; it can come up in educational organizations like schools; it can come up in government; it can come up in corporations or partnerships. And it can come up even in ... church.

Today's text is the introduction to I Corinthians. This was a letter, an epistle. It is penned by the Apostle Paul. It was to a group of people who were in Corinth. Corinth was a seaport town much like San Francisco. A lot of sailors were coming in and going out. Because of this, there was a lot of rampant immorality. In fact, to be called a "Corinthian" was considered to be a degrading term because of how corrupt and how immoral Corinth had come to be known. And yet, the Apostle Paul goes there on his second missionary journey. He spends a year and a half developing a congregation there. He is willing to go to a place like that to spread the Gospel! And those who joined the congregation he got to know very well. A close relationship was established between him as the pastor and the rest of the congregation.

That did not mean that they were immune from dysfunctionality. Hardly. In fact the Apostle Paul from this opening preface which is our text, springs forth from here to address all manner and kinds of problems that he found within the congregation. There was conflict within the congregation because some favored certain pastors over others. There were people taking fellow Christians to court. There were people who were engaged in sexual immorality because they had been influenced by the world. There was pride in spiritual gifts. They were failing to do church discipline. There were people troubling the consciences of others by abuse of their Christian freedom. There was a misunderstanding about the Lord's Supper. They misunderstood the resurrection. The place was a total mess!

Think of the headache that Paul had as a pastor in addressing these situations. Knowing that by bringing these things up it would likely cause some hurt feelings. It would likely cause him further headaches because people would be upset with him. Yet he knew that if he ignored these things he would be failing in his responsibility to the Lord as a spiritual leader of the congregation. Yes, the Apostle Paul did not neglect to do what he needed to do; but he did so carefully, lovingly, and yet certainly firmly. He introduced this letter in an amazing way when you look at our text given all these problems, making a marvelous summary of God's grace. In verse 4 he says:

<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, ...

As we consider the state of Grace Lutheran Church here at the beginning of 2020, we must readily and honestly admit: our church isn't perfect. We have problems. There are times when there are those who are in conflict with each other; there are times when the ugliness of pride puts up obstacles; there are times when we have to deal with health issues; there are times when some in our congregation are impacted by the immorality that is out there in the world; there are times when the devil uses worldly philosophies to swaying some from the faith; there are times when there may be apathy; there are times when people will trample upon the consciences of others; there are times when there are doctrinal misunderstandings.

Our church isn't perfect. But it is so important to remain honest and admit that we have problems. If we were to promise that we are a perfect church here at Grace, we would be lying. And it amazes me at how many churches advertise today. One would think that the original Garden of Eden still existed--that there was perfection here on earth. God forbid that we would ever give that fake impression of ourselves!

We are a congregation that is organized because we realize we are sinners. And we realize that we need God's amazing and marvelous grace. It is His grace that compelled Jesus to go to the cross. It is His grace that compelled Jesus to secure for us the forgiveness of sins. It is His grace that gave us the treasure of eternal paradise. And we all need to take advantage of the public ministry to realize that we have these blessings. It is through the public ministry that our faith's attention becomes vividly focused on this vital Gospel message. It's all for our spiritual healing! In just a few verses after our text, the Apostle Paul says this:

**1 Corinthians 1:18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

This is precisely why we have a church along with the pastoral ministry. Notice that our text begins by recognizing the divine call in verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,

The Apostle Paul is speaking about his divine call to be an apostle. And that is something that they are to respect as he begins his letter to them. This is important for us to remember ... both for me as a pastor and for you as a church. As a pastor, I need to realize that my call is to serve in humility, not circumventing my own will on the flock. I'm rather to recognize that this is **God's** flock, not my own. The word "pastor" means shepherd; the word "minister" means servant. And I am simply to lead God's flock with the souls that are in my care by serving them with God's Word. I was vividly reminded of this recently with the professor call that I considered. One of the things that I really deliberated was this: as a professor I would be teaching students how to apply the Word, but as a pastor I would be actually applying the Word on a regular basis. It's real life! And as pastor I'm involved in the daily care of the previous souls here at Grace. From the baptizing of a little infant to being at the bedside of someone who is dying and singing a hymn to him/her, the entire spectrum of ages is covered with the daily care of the pastoral ministry by considering all the many and diverse challenges that each of us goes through in life. And as I do all this, my approach is to be like that of the apostle Paul: carefully, lovingly, and yet firmly, even though there may be times when the ministry will not be well received.

Now the church is to recognize that the call is divine as well. A call consideration is not only helpful for the pastor. But it is helpful for the whole church! It helps us all re-evaluate our priorities in life. It helps us all realize that God is the One in control. We have no control over how the Lord is going to lead the pastor, if he is going to accept or return a call. But it also helps us realize how important the pastoral ministry is in our midst. It helps us realize that this is what God has given us so that there is someone here to be able to share His Word and to teach His Word faithfully. In the book of Ephesians 4:11-12 it says this:

**Ephesians 4:11-12** And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ...

This means that God has given these different kinds of ministries, including the pastors, as a way to help us as we go through our faith journey by understanding His Word. That is why we are to respect the divine call. With Paul, we call him the “Apostle Paul” for a reason. This term respects the call that he had. This same thing applies when you address me as “Pastor,” as it shows respect to the call that God has shared among us.

Why is it divine? It’s because divine work is happening among us through the pastoral ministry. It’s not **my** work, but **God’s** work. As I preach the truth of God’s Word and faith is created and/or strengthened, that’s God accomplishing His purposes. The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Word, and He is the One who brings and keeps you in the faith. Not me. I can’t do that. I can’t do that to your heart. I can only proclaim the Word that God has directed me to proclaim. I am merely a mouthpiece as I speak the truth of God’s Word.

But notice verse one also mentions another name: Sosthenese. That is a name in the Bible that isn’t well known. When the Apostle Paul originally preached in Corinth, he developed a good rapport with the people in the congregation there. But there were enemies in Corinth who took the Apostle Paul and brought him before the city magistrate, sort of like a mayor. But while the Apostle Paul was before him, angry people took Sosthenese, one of the members of his church, and beat him. It says in Acts 18:17,

**Acts 18:17** Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. ...

They were trying to impact the Apostle Paul by seeing one of the results of his ministry be bullied right in front of him. Can you imagine how that tore at the Apostle Paul’s heart? But this is how the teaching and preaching of the Word can impact others, to where they too take up the cross and are willing to follow Jesus no matter what the result is. Today Sosthenes would probably be much like our congregational president, or maybe one of the elders. It would truly rip at my heart knowing that my ministry caused them much harm and danger. And yet that kind of commitment is the divine work of the Holy Spirit. That’s why pastors are always to appreciate the work that God accomplishes through one’s ministry, as did the Apostle Paul in verses 4-9:

<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, <sup>6</sup> even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, <sup>7</sup> so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

As your pastor I am always amazed to see how our Lord works among us. To see how the Holy Spirit is working through the Word that I preach, the Word that I share in the Bible class, the Word I share with the catechism students, the Word I share in the morning devotions here in our Christian day school, ... to see everyone carry that Word with them, commit to it, and actually apply it. That’s all God’s doing! All I can do is stand back and say: “WOW! Isn’t that amazing?!” That’s what the Apostle Paul is recognizing with the Corinthian congregation, and that’s what I recognize is going on here at Grace as your pastor. I thank God for that!

In many ways, the pastor and the congregation relationship is like going on a sea-faring journey. We are sailing across the sea of life together. Sometimes the calm waves are gently nudging the boat. Life is going along well. The sun is shining. And we all go on with our journey together as we all appreciate each other. We appreciate what God is doing in our midst. Then there are times when the sea gets rather stormy, when inclement weather strikes and those waves come crashing upon that boat as we are together riding in it. Maybe some get seasick along the journey and we have to address those issues as they come. But we are still in that boat together. And we are eager to reach that shining shore that is just off on the horizon where the sun is setting in colorful, splendid beauty. We are trying to get to that destination together, dear Christians: eternal paradise with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So we ride that boat together, taking that journey together as we need each other as we sail on. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor John Hein  
Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church – January 19, 2020