

Let God Use Who You Are 2023  
1 Corinthians 1:2-10, 12:12-14, 18-20, 27

### 1 Corinthians 1:2-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 18-20, 27 (New Revised Standard Version)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

A few weeks ago, Kathy and I enjoyed watching  
the second Avatar movie, “The Way of Water”.

If you haven’t seen it,

is well worth the little extra they charge to see it in 3d,  
because that really **changes and enhances how you see everything.**

The book of Acts tells the story about Saul on his way to Damascus  
to arrest and persecute any Christians he could find there.

But along the way, he had an encounter with the risen Christ  
and that for him **changed everything,** including his name to Paul.

From then on he was able to **see through 3d-God-colored glasses,**  
more aware & appreciative of the abiding grace & presence of God.  
So Paul spent the rest of his life traveling and proclaiming  
the Good News about Jesus Christ throughout the Roman empire.

Paul preaches, teaches and practices **a theology focused on grace,**  
in which everything is about God’s gracious gift of love,  
and everything else builds upon that reality and truth.

Paul stayed in Corinth preaching and teaching for almost two years,  
and he established an early Christian community of new believers.

Then, when he moved on to evangelize elsewhere,

**that church of mostly recent & inexperienced Christians  
got seriously off track and needed more instruction.**

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians is Paul's letter to that struggling congregation  
as he pushes pretty hard at times trying to get them back on track.  
But in all his writings, the Apostle is always focused on God's grace,  
how grace along with the gifts & blessing of God **changes everything...**  
**... yet somehow the Christians in Corinth had missed the point.**

But Paul doesn't jump right in and attack their mistakes and issues.  
Instead, he offers a more grace-driven and hopeful vision  
about how God's gift of grace redefines who & what we are, vs. 2.

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus,  
called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
both their Lord and ours.

More than just a warm and friendly greeting,  
this is the foundation of our faith and a statement about  
**what defines who we are in Christ, as Christians and the Church.**

**"sanctified in Christ Jesus"**

Theologically, sanctified specifically and literally means  
to set something apart as reserved for God's holy purpose,  
**in which the common and ordinary becomes special & extraordinary.**

For example a couple weeks ago when we baptized Sophia,  
it was ordinary tap-water her sister poured into the font  
that also could have been used to brew tea or fill a squirt-gun.

But that water became something special, a sign and means of grace,  
that signified something very important that God has done for us,  
a statement that by grace God has chosen and called each of us,  
created, blessed and equipped each one of us to serve well.

Paul continues his message to the Christians in Corinth, vs. 3

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**"Grace to you"** The word grace refers to God's infinite gift of mercy,  
which means that we are all loved, chosen, equipped & precious.  
Regardless of our failures and flaws, our pasts and deficiencies,  
grace is the healing and hope that brings us home & makes us whole.

**"and peace"** Peace is much more than the absence of war and strife.  
The word refers to the condition of human existence & living  
within God's commandments, will, intention and purpose.

It is the condition of being **an oasis of grace** which means,  
being in a right and whole relationship with both God and neighbor,  
by living as God intends, commands and desires for us,

blessed, and using our life, gifts and resources well,  
and experiencing the satisfaction of pleasing the Lord.

As God's people, the Spirit is present and resides in each one of us,  
to live out and proclaim the Good News of God's grace and favor,  
as plantings of the Lord **called to blossom with God's glory.**

Together, grace & peace describe God's gift and blessing in Christ,  
the cleansing, healing & salvation that God has done for each of us,  
which enables us to serve together in common-unity, as the Church.  
as believers and disciples, as beloved children of God,  
who faithfully make a difference as God intends for us.

So, even though the Church in Corinth has gotten seriously off-track,  
yet Paul isn't about to give up on them, but is thankful for them,  
and hopeful **because the grace of God is that powerful,** vs. 4-7

*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given  
you in Christ Jesus for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every  
kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in  
any spiritual gift ... He will also strengthen you to the end.*

All of Paul's attention is on what God is doing and accomplishing.  
They have been enriched, they have been strengthened,  
and they are not lacking anything, **all because of God's grace.**

It's all about God, the Lord plays the lead, our role is minor,  
which is simply to live out God's gracious & divine purpose as led...  
... for which we need to see through **3d-God-colored lenses,**  
which makes grace and peace our operating theme and focus,  
because our God is that gracious and faithful, vs. 9, 12:13

*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. For  
in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all  
made to drink of one Spirit.*

Paul's whole focus is on the grace of God given through Jesus,  
which isn't about self-help, nor a self-improvement program --  
- but it's all love and mercy, our God who seeks the lost,  
who races out to greet and restore the prodigal son,  
who eats with sinners, outcasts and failures,  
and promises eternal life to a criminal **while dying on a cross.**

By grace and faith we have all been grafted into the body of Christ,  
a metaphor representing the church, our faith-community & family,  
where we develop and live out our faith as we participate  
actively and usefully in the life and mission of the Church  
as an expression of our shared faith & commitments, vs. 12, 14

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many,  
are one body, so it is with Christ. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. But as  
it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

The Church of Jesus Christ is uniquely where we grow in God's grace,  
which equips us each to serve the Church's mission and purpose,  
so that together, we can make a difference in this world.

So one of our primary tasks then,  
is to discover our own gifts and help others discern their gifts,  
so to use them for the blessing and building up of the whole body,  
for that is an important way we as Christians grow in our faith.

The point is, no one person has all the gifts that the church needs,  
& no one person's gift is so important that the others don't matter.

All of us are each entrusted with blessings for the whole body.  
God bestows wonderful gifts for benefit of the whole church,  
giving to us as grace and blessing beyond our salvation,  
equipping us to do something extraordinary - to do ministry.  
So each person's gifts are uniquely & equally important & necessary.

One time a man stopped to watch and admire a huge cathedral, and a little girl sitting nearby asked if he liked it. Surprised, he answered, "Yes I do. It is very beautiful and impressive."

She replied, "Thank you, I helped built it."

The man smiled and said, "You're awfully young to have worked on such a large building, tell me what did you do?"

The little girl proudly announced, "My father is a stonecutter. And every day that he worked on this church, I brought him his lunch."

All of us have been gathered into the Church to be the body of Christ  
individually called & equipped to live out God's grace & blessings,  
and trusting God's grace to mold and gradually reshape us,  
in the process of God stretching us into Christ's image...

**... so that God's grace overflows – spilling out onto others,  
and so that we become blessings and hope to our world in need,  
as we affirm & encourage the very best that each has to offer.**

In God's kingdom, each of us is but one servant among the many,  
all under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, guidance of the Spirit,  
to serve usefully according to the purpose of the Lord our God,  
as we seek to discern and serve God's will as a congregation.

Today we are going to ordain and install church officers,  
servant leaders who have been called and equipped by the Lord  
at this particular time to serve here in a particular way for  
building up this body of Christ toward mission & outreach.

Elders, those who serve to rule, dream and envision our mission,  
And deacons,  
who serve to guide & carry out our ministries of compassion.

But let that in no way cause the rest of us to minimize or deny  
the critical importance of what God has entrusted to each of us,  
**for there is nothing more important for us to know and trust  
than the truth and promise that God is love and faithful ...**

...and may that be the empowering, guiding and transforming,  
and hopeful vision for our congregation this coming year,  
that trusts God's will, call, purpose and plans for our church.

Therefore as these new officers make their vows today,  
you might also consider your gifts, your blessings,  
and God's call to you ... and make your promise to God.

My fellow believers and disciples, because God is faithful  
let us be united in our purpose and vision, trusting the truth  
that each one has been chosen, called and equipped in Christ.

**And that applies not just to pastors and deacons and elders.**

Our Presbyterian Book of Order describes it this way:

"One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of officers who are ordained to fulfill particular functions. The existence of these officers in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of **all** members to the total ministry of the church. These ordained officers differ from other members in function only."

God has called us to a massive undertaking of rebuilding after Covid,  
the many aspects & details of strengthening our mission & programs,  
as each one of us and all of us here at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres.  
to participate and serve as we have been called and equipped...

**... and let that be the hopeful vision of the beloveds at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres.**

A metaphor that I find helpful  
for describing Christian leadership in a faith community,  
is to think of a group of musicians playing jazz together.

First, they agree on a vision, the melody, tempo and key,  
then, while listening to the other musicians,  
each plays in a way that fits with the others ...

**... and their musical contributions all combined  
become something far greater than the sum of the parts.**

Similarly, we will be ordaining and installing men and women  
whom we believe God has called to serve as deacons and elders,  
to help lead this church to grow in our mission and outreach  
because they love God, and want to serve and follow Jesus.

Church leadership is not about rank, prestige, ego or privilege.  
Being a church leader is about modeling Christian life,  
about faithfulness and integrity, a Christ-like character,  
that listens and cooperates as a team building up the body of Christ.

And, that shared leadership can help envision & create an environment  
where more and more people are welcomed and encouraged  
to discover and develop their own gifts for ministry,  
where reflecting God's love, all are empowered and appreciated,  
and no one's work is deemed more important than any other's.

Or as the apostle Paul describes it in *Philippians 2:3-5*

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.