

2016 NL2 WK33 Acts 18:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18
16-04-24 Easter 5

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

As a congregation, as a gathering of people who are called by God to worship and serve in Jesus' name, we have been concentrating on renewal. Basically, what we voted to do 3 years ago was listen to the Holy Spirit (which is really a no-brainer in any church, but it's nice to have it be in front of us), to be willing to try holy experiments, to be vulnerable and flexible in our ways, to enter into conversation with each other. These are things that healthy congregations do.

So we formed a renewal team, and we consulted with Kairos and Associates – Pastor Joe, who came in and helped us,.... and we have been reading a book as a team to better understand some of the dynamics involved in renewal.

And one of the things that we have learned along the way is that while we seek to be united in Christ, we do not have to be uniform.

While we seek to work together, we don't all need to be doing the same thing – we can't...., and as Paul talks about in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians – later in this same book... God's design is that we each are gifted in different ways for the benefit of the whole community.

Another thing that we have learned is that conflict happens – and that is okay.... maybe uncomfortable, but okay... because we all care about this place, the ministry, and each other. And we won't always agree, even when presented with the same information. I see things from my view, and you see things from yours, and the person next to you...., behind...., in front...., diagonally...., all see things from their seats..... It happened in the church in Corinth and THEY made it into the Bible, why would we or any church expect to be free of occasional conflict?

Finally, the book counselled us that just by using the word, "Renewal," some people's anxiety will shoot up. And their anxiety will show itself in all kinds of ways. Just be ready for it, and don't panic. TALK to each other.....

So we have done that. We have had conversations at formally called meetings like the annual meetings, and informal ones, like "Yak and Snak," so that we can be in it together. And we have agreed on some things and other things – not.... But we have all agreed that we are in this ministry together. And I thank God for that commitment that we have. It's true in most churches, but this is the place that God has gathered US. And by "US" I mean everyone here today – the "US" changes each week – we never have exactly the same group of people here two weeks in a row....., so God gathers whoever comes....., ones who want to be here and to be sent out to serve.

Paul wrote to his beloved people in Corinth because he had heard through the grapevine, Chloe and her people, that there were divisions arising in their church. Mostly they were trying to align themselves with the teachings of one leader over the others, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas, (who is Peter)" or "I belong to Christ."

I'm a 12!

I'm a Vike!

Or, I'm a Cheesehead!.....

Huskies or Cougs.....

I'm a republican! I'm a democrat! I'm an independent!.....

I'm a Pharisee! I'm a Sadducee! I'm a Zealot!.....

U...S...A...!

We align ourselves in all kinds of ways, some of which wield power in this world and others are just for fun.

But the church is different.... As was the accusation in last weeks reading,.... we turn the world upside down.... Because God in Christ has turned the world upside down..... We turn the world upside down by preaching a crucified Messiah..... We turn the world upside down by serving. Power in weakness. Power in the cross. Not like power in the world where people use any means possible to trample on those below them:

Scare tactics....., partial truths....., strong arming....., instead of just sitting down and talking it out.

Paul's people in Corinth were aligning, with their favorite preacher, not necessarily with Christ. We have that religious smorgasbord even today. People can align with a preacher....., a kind of music....., a time of day....., a particular style..... and it isn't all negative.

Still, Paul calls us to unity.... In Christ.... For the sake of the world..... BECAUSE Jesus loves you and the world. Jesus, who was crucified by the very ones he came to save, still loves. Jesus, who could have run away from the cross,

went to the cross,

suffered on the cross,

preached from the cross,

died on the cross....., and was buried.

AND... he turned the world upside down. He got up from the dead..., Jesus got up in his grave clothes, and walked out of the tomb. Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the crucified and risen one,... turned the world upside down. He showed his power in the weakness of death – a Messiah doesn't die!!! AND Jesus' power was completed in his resurrection – your Messiah....., died AND rose..... and in that, he defined WHO AND HOW his people would be.

You are saved because Jesus in his grace and mercy decided to be for you. You are saved not because you have power, but because Jesus does. Not the way the world sees it, who can believe a crucified Messiah who wasn't a military victor???.... But upside down power.....

And so, in this place,

we preach Christ crucified.

We preach power in death AND resurrection – in confession and forgiveness.

We preach service to our neighbor in the name of Christ.

The world might see serving as weak, but in God's church it is the power of life.....

At our last Yak and Snak gathering we continued the conversation about surfacing a guiding vision at First Lutheran. Every so often a congregation needs to do this, and Pastor Joe suggested that it was time for us to do it.

So we have been talking with each other, and praying. And at the end of our conversation last time the feeling was that the renewal team should put together everything that we've been talking about and then suggest a vision statement.

A short,

memorize-able phrase

that begins to describe whose we are and what that means.

So we came up with this, our (beta)-vision statement. One that we can try on for size to see how it fits: People gathered and sent in the name of Christ. We chose each word with care and listening.

People – not “a people” which suggests particularity, but all kinds of people from all over in all ways – saint, sinner, sober, recovering, using, male, female, young, old, Jew, Greek, slave, free, powerful, powerless, rich, poor, black, brown, white, all gender identities and orientations, those walking, using canes, or using wheelchairs, lifelong Poulsohemians, and people who aren't from here, don't live here, just like to visit. People!!!!

Gathered and sent – the verbs are passive voice, they suggest a purpose, they suggest that we are acted upon and for... accomplished by another – Christ our Lord. Christ gathers people here to love, forgive, and comfort them. And then Christ sends out those people to love, forgive, and comfort others.

In the name of Christ – not in Paul's or Apollos' or Peter's name or any human being's name, but in the name of Christ, who is Jesus crucified and risen, the Messiah, the one who shows weakness by bestowing grace and mercy, whose power was made strong in weakness, the weakness of the cross, turning the world upside down..... For you.....

Let's try this on for awhile.

Amen.....