

Ps 40; Is 49:1-7; I Cor 1:1-9; Jn 1:29-42

The Apostle Paul stayed in touch with the churches he had started all over the Empire. He had a special place in his heart for the church at Corinth. Imagine you had helped to start a congregation in Atlantic City NJ or Las Vegas NV. You would be concerned about the surrounding culture and society the Jesus-followers have to deal with. You would be eager to hear good news about their fellowship and ministry and mission activities.

This helps us understand Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. There were major problems in the church there. The paganism and the moral laxity of the surrounding culture had seeped into the words and actions of the fellowship – even into the leadership.

We are looking at a greeting in the Greek style. Paul names himself and a fellow minister, Sosthenes. There is a lot to think about even in this greeting. Many synagogues and those who attended them hated Paul and tried to torpedo his ministry – even tried to kill him. It may be

that Sosthenes is the Jew who refused to press charges against Paul (Ac 18:17). Sosthenes is named as the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. When a synagogue group brought charges against Paul in the Roman court, the judge called upon a man named Sosthenes. The mob attacked this Sosthenes when he would not speak against Paul, a Christian preacher who visited the Corinthian synagogue. Although the connection between the synagogue ruler and the co-author of the Letter to the Corinthians can't be proven, it is intriguing. They may not be the same person. But it could be that a man who should have been hostile toward Paul turned out to be a brother in Christ after all. It is important to keep an open mind about people, it seems to me. This is Human Relations Sunday in the UMC. We who follow Jesus are to be loving and welcoming toward all peoples – making no distinction according to who or what they are or where they come from. That does not mean we change our own values to accommodate any and all ideas and practices of the world.

Paul continues in the Hellenistic Greek tradition of addressing those to whom he is writing. He

describes them in a very pointed way:
(You are) Believers in Jesus who have been cleaned up by Him and set apart (called) to be filled with God's presence. He is not criticizing them yet. He is telling them who the Lord and he believe them to be. The people of the church are loved and blessed and given grace by the Lord first of all. Paul then includes believers anywhere who read his letter. That is certainly you and me.

He then sets up his relationship with this congregation – and with you and me. He declares: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (v 5) The Apostle Paul blesses the Corinthians first and foremost. He doesn't stick with the regular Greek greeting. He changes it to reflect that his greeting is in the Lord who gives grace and peace.

Paul tells the Corinthians that grace is given only by God in Jesus Christ. He acknowledges that the matter before them – the thing he wants to get straight with the congregation is the truth about spiritual gifts.

There has been bitter division among them about knowledge of the things of God and how they

speak during church services. So, the word of knowledge and speaking in other tongues are the spiritual gifts in question. There are accusations back and forth among the people. There is strife and argument right in the service of worship. Meanwhile, the pagan cult of Aphrodite – or Venus – has seeped into the church. Mixing the two religions – Jesus-worship and Venus-worship hurts the church. This cannot be.

In the fellowship of Jesus-followers we stick to the pure Gospel message. It is Christ who gives every spiritual gift – both then and now. Jesus Christ is the One we worship at all times.

Paul reminds the saints at Corinth that Jesus is the One we watch for and worship. Jesus is in the midst of the saints at all times

The bottom line is that Jesus is the source of all grace and it is Jesus who strengthens His saints to be faithful and to do His will. Jesus sees us as His beloved people. As it was then, so it is today here and now. Grace and strength to you!

We are not going to go into the correction Paul is about to give the church of Corinth. It is a difficult discussion. There are poor attitudes and

unfortunate behaviors and outright sinful practices in the church at Corinth. Paul will get to all that. Correction in Christ is loving and encouraging and hopeful. The Lord corrects us because He loves us. Grace and strength to you! Amen.