

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 16:1-11 for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar

We continue worship by sitting under the shade of the word of God, his revelation, the story of Jesus. And we wait upon the wind of the Spirit to send us in the direction of this word... to help us receive and respond to it.

Today is Mother's Day and it is one of those days that many people have an opinion about, just how it should be celebrated as to not offend - and we get that, we desire to care for the whole church, each week. But it is also an opportunity for us to live out the call to outdo one another in showing honor. So thank you mothers... and get some rest!

The attributes that we honor on a day like today are not only reserved for mothers but hopefully are found in them; caring, nurturing, availability, faithfulness and of course, self-sacrifice. These are traits that make anyone special and also what usually endears our Mothers to us.

As we study Scripture this morning we will see a church that is meant to be like a really good mother!

A gospel-formed church is sacrificial, supportive, and safe.

1 Corinthians 16:1-11 “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. [2] On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. [3] And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. [4] If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

[5] I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, [6] and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. [7] For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. [8] But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, [9] for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

[10] When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. [11] So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.” (ESV)

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We have arrived at the final chapter of this grand letter to the Corinthian church. A ragtag group of misfits living in a city of prominence, economic might and religious variety. The Apostle Paul, the author as inspired by the Spirit, has covered a lot of ground answering questions that the church forwarded to him as they lived out life together trying to figure things out. Paul is regularly bringing them back to Christ and him crucified as the central point of faith and even

life and the greatest passion in his style and tone is reserved for when something has clouded their understanding and response to the gospel.

There is lots of correction, even some harsh words that over our months of study have maybe even made us squirm a bit. But it is for their good and equally for us, to be reminded back to the center, the things that matter and that are meant to shape us as a people in all of life.

Following the earth shaking good news of not only Christ's resurrection but the resurrection promised for all who believe in him, the letter flows into what results from what was proclaimed as of first importance. Our text today presents what a body, a people formed by Christ and him crucified and resurrected looks like.

This is the result of being gospel-formed. Have in your mind a sculptor, the chisel in his hand, which is the good news of Christ, that news is shaping us, creating us.

The masterpiece is a church that is sacrificial, supportive and safe... and our prayer today is that we would likewise be formed.

1) Sacrificial

“Now concerning the collection for the saints...” Turning to another issue the church probably wrote to Paul asking for instruction and he answers very matter-of-factly, as if none of the tension of the difficult issues exists. They are to give of their own wealth to serve other believers.

There was a famine in Judea, which was already the poorest Roman province, and Paul had called on other churches, in Galatia and Asia, to send money to the church in Jerusalem to provide for the believers and the ministry there.

The church then is generous toward each other and other believers far off, they are sacrificing for the mission. In an economic environment not unlike ours, either you owned land which produced a profit for you or you labored in the local industry... and we know that in this church there are people up and down the scale of affluence (those that could come early to communion or that brought their own meal while others could not). And money is money - it is what helps you provide for yourself, your family. It is how you get ahead, advance in the world.

Here though is direction to sacrifice what is hard-earned for the benefit of people that they had never met. And this is most likely on top of what they share among themselves as they serve one another.

We have all been asked for money... you know the feeling, awkwardness...

Times haven't changed much, we all know how sensitive we can get when it comes to money and giving. We have long-held perspectives on what is “ours” and who exactly can have access to

that. Think of how quick you are to share how much you make - or how willing you are to let other people know how you spend your money... and I am not talking about sharing with strangers; but the people that we are made family with in Christ. So go ahead and lay all of your own perspectives of money on the call to sacrifice for others... and you can feel the pull, just how hard it is.

"the "collection" was not some mere matter of money, but was for Paul an active response to the grace of God that not only ministered to the needs of God's people but also became a kind of ministry to God himself, which resulted in thanksgiving toward God and in a bond of fellowship between "God's people" across the Empire." Gordon Fee

And Paul does no convincing - like he has in other areas of giving up rights and striving for unity, he proved those things. Here it is almost like it is a no brainer, that if they believed any of what came before they would do this.

There is no "give as you FEEL led" just a routine action of putting money aside and storing it to be given out.

This is the church learning to share by giving what is hard-earned and much more difficult to part with than a loaf of bread... Paul gives specific instructions in verse 2 on how to do this, because he knows that sharing is not natural and that sinners need help getting out of themselves because they turn inward, especially with their money and their things... developing virtue...

The sharing is done consistently. On the first day of every week... there is a rhythm, a regularity, a habit of it. A virtue that is developed over time; here is how you start.

Next it is shared proportionally. Each is to set aside and store it up "as he may prosper." Like Paul is saying the more you gain, the more you can give. There is not a flat rate but the sacrifice is dependant on the success of the endeavors of the believer.

Then the giving, the sharing is done deliberately. Here it is "so that there will be no collecting when I come." Not an afterthought... not a scrounging of what is leftover. It is priority, not put off.

For the church this is a reconciling with others - the cultural and ethnic difference between Greek Corinth and Jerusalem, Jewish believers and Gentile believers. They are doing it by giving away what God owns. Sacrificing for the sake of others, giving of their livelihood to benefit strangers in the kingdom. This posture doesn't end with one offering... it goes on in their interaction with Paul and other ministers, other believers.

2) Supportive

This is the church providing for the pastor! (*I like this one*)

Paul tells of his plans to come to Corinth and minister among them, and his desire to stay there with them for an extended period. "I hope to spend some time with you..." Paul wants more than the Corinthians money, he wants them.

The church sharing life, not only with a closed group of local believers but with those coming from far away. There is friendship here and a relationship of mutual help. Paul will continue to pour into them, teaching, laboring with them and they will help him on his mission.

But the church will bear with a wait, because there is ministry opportunity where Paul is in Ephesus. "A wide door for effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries."

Many are coming to faith in Christ in Ephesus and it is radically changing the economy of the city, and Paul is facing opposition as he preaches the gospel and cares for the church. This is the counterintuitive way of Christian ministry. Where in the rest of life we usually look for the path with the least amount of opposition, it seems that here it is a sign of effective work. Where there is the greatest opportunity there is always opposition.

It is a spiritual reality, we face an enemy that hates Jesus being proclaimed and people believing in him. Where there is a wide door Satan attempts to close it at all costs. The upside down reality of ministry, when it is hard and idols fight back, it is exactly where we want to be.

Paul doesn't look for the quickest exit... he lingers, laboring all the more. Because he believes the mission, he has had an encounter with the real Jesus and he must see others hear of his grace. But also I think he can continue laboring because he knows the church is supporting him, that they stand united with him in opportunity and opposition. Because they will mutually encourage each other, and the church will help, financially support, him on his journey.

The apostle and the church will be equipped for ministry as they are supportive of Paul and the mission of the church. Again no convincing, of "hoping" they will help. There is a trust between them, yet unbroken, that he can rely on them and they can rely on him - both to care and nurture, minister and challenge.

It is what the church, those redeemed in Christ, do. It is a people and place of support for one another, people to people, people to pastors, pastors to people.

This gospel-formed church is sacrificial, giving of its wealth and supportive, giving of its time, its opportunity to be with Paul for the sake of the mission. And they are also safe.

3) Safe

Not only is Paul planning to come but he is also sending other missionaries to preach and be encouraged by the church. And the expectation is that the church will be a safe place for those that come.

“See that you put him, Timothy, at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace...” Essentially, take care of Timothy like you would take care of me. On the surface this seems easier than taking a collection, or even supporting Paul (the One correcting them, calling them out). But Timothy is different from the ideal...

In Corinth credentials and status were everything. “Where an individual attended school mattered. Degrees mattered; one’s occupation mattered. People would ask questions like “how much do you make?” or “where do you live?” This was the kind of sizing up that happened time and again. They had started off with Paul, who basically had the equivalency of a couple of modern PhDs, along with the entrepreneurial success of founding more than fourteen new churches, which in turn spawned countless daughter churches of their own - and they still gave him a hard time! Now Timothy wasn’t half the man Paul was. He was not as accomplished or flashy, and neither credentials nor commanding charisma were his thing. He wasn’t really the Corinthians’ type.”

Still the call is to welcome him, to receive him and be a safe place for him. That they would reach across every dividing line, including those of competency, credentialing, and status.

This attribute of safety extends not only to traveling ministers. But to everyone, to those looking for Jesus, to those that encourage us in Christ, to those with different perspectives and pasts. Safe in that we take away the pressure to perform, “at ease,” and we learn them, we value them. There is honoring over despising.

Ray Ortlund - articulating the safety of the church... “Think of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. It greeted the ships filled with immigrants coming into this country. There’s a plaque on that statue that says, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” [This is the church! We should hang it as a banner on our doors!] “Safety, (the church as) an unaccused place to land, not being put under negative scrutiny, not having to wonder what’s going on behind your back, but being honored and welcomed even as we remain sinners.”

This is the church as a place of rest and protection, of help. This is what Paul is convinced the church is to be like.

It is safe because it is a place the gospel is proclaimed and cherished. Where we have the time to grow in these virtues as we learn them and lean into them.

To be sacrificial, supportive and safe. We avoid churches described by opposite attributes... so we get that this is a valuable, worthwhile posture for the church.

And it is not just a corporate reality, these are personal to each member of the church, all living sacrificial, supportive and safe.

But let's be honest. This all gets at some of the hardest things to give up. My money - there isn't a lot of it, but I worked for it, I NEED it... My time and emotional energy - where I want to come in and be ministered to by the likes of Paul, I am instead to minister to others. Safety... I am all about my personal safety, but to be safe for someone with different political views, someone from the slums, someone that never went to college, law school, grad school and seminary...

So why be like this? Paul doesn't give a reward for it. There is no "do this so that you might get that..." It is all rather assumed. And it is not at all disconnected to the truths he has laid out in the hundreds of words that have come before.

1 Corinthians 1:2-3 "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: [3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (ESV)

All of the calls to unity, to love one another, to express our diverse and varied gifts, to wait for one another, to put the other before us, land here. And why?

Jesus did this for us, and he is transforming us to be like him... he sacrificed everything, to travel the long road bringing a gift. Where there was opportunity he faced violent adversaries. As they surrounded him and beat him, sentenced him to death, he willingly took every blow, each swing of the hammer as nails sliced through his arms and feet. He gave of himself on the cross for us.

Jesus ministered not only with his disciples and crowds, but he ministers now to us through his word and the Holy Spirit. As comforter. As equipper and empowerer.

He is the ultimately safe place. We bring all of us, the despised parts, our sin, our rebellion, our lack of faith, our wrong perspectives and our failed attempts to earn his favor, and he takes it all. He takes the exhaustion, the anxiety of the unknown, the list still to be done. He takes it upon himself, wrapping his arms of welcome around us. Granting us security by his righteousness, his standing before God. Giving us rest, and hope.

This truth, as we return to it over and over again, forms us. Grace that captures the heart spurs the believer into selfless service rather than selfish indulgence. We love because he first loved us. We sacrifice because he was the sacrifice for us. We support because he gave us the Spirit and the church to hold us up. We are safe because he is safe for us.

What Paul is instructing, this direction for the church is not advice but indicator. This will be done as the church rightly sees that they are those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints

together will all that call upon the name of Jesus. This is the response to the gift of grace and peace given to us by Jesus.

I think we too often approach the grace of Christ as if it is not meant to change us, shift our priorities. Like a fortune cookie that makes us laugh or feel good but has no real bearing.

Do you have anything that so entralls you and moves you that it changes how you spend, who you give your time to and who you surround yourself with? Jesus longs to be that for you... By looking to him, by being in relationship with him... this happens.

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Response: What do we do with this direction for the church?

Behold Jesus. Believe in him. See his work on the cross for you. The life he gives you through the resurrection. The gift of grace he relentlessly pours out for you. The approval you have in him. Stare at his glory until you see it.

Be shaped by the gospel. Hear it. Rehearse it. Share it. This power of God for salvation, that Christ came, lived, died and was raised for you. That sin has been defeated. That you are secure in Christ, seated in the heavenly places even now.

Give yourself. As you may prosper, give of your money, time, encouragement, talents, your friendship to other believers. Be safe for those that are different. Be the church! Make it a habit - developing virtue is a process that begins with our thoughts and results in our deeds. Like a harvest from crops carefully planted years ago and tended with constant attention.

The church as a mother... sacrificial, supportive and safe. This is what we are made into by the Spirit all because of Christ and all for Christ.

All of this is done in light of what has already been won, what has been given in Christ. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Are you down for it? Me too.