

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Holy Comforter Church

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A few years ago, I was privileged to serve as a clergy leader on a trip to Greece. The theme of the trip was “Journeys of Paul.” We went to a number of places – Athens, Thessaloniki, Philippi, Ephesus (which is now in Turkey) and, of course, Corinth.

Now this was one of those trips that could be described as “it’s Tuesday, it must be Athens.” You may have traveled that way at some time yourself. When you look back on the trip, it may seem like a blur and it is hard to place events and places, because they all run together. Much of my “Journeys of Paul” was like that. It was a great trip, but these several years later – much of it has run together.

Be that as it may, however, I do very much remember Corinth. In Corinth, there were many large pieces of marble --- mostly columns from destroyed buildings – these were strewn over a very large area. Of course there were also sites where certain structures had been – but I don’t remember any building actually still standing intact. There was nothing at all like the Parthenon in Athens in the ruins of Corinth.

One of the reasons I remember Corinth was the reputation of the place – its history. Dr. Fred Horton, (Professor, WFU department of Religion) says that “The city of Corinth was a byword in the ancient world for drunkenness and debauchery.” (Commentary on the Lectionary) Corinth was a wealthy port city during the time of

Paul's visit to the city and at the time of his letter - which we are reading part of today.

Corinth was the center of what we might describe today as the 'sex trade.' There were large numbers of prostitutes plying their trade in what was apparently a 'wide open city.' It was the first century equivalent of 'Vegas.'

Who knows, maybe they said, "What happens in Corinth, stays in Corinth." I guess that didn't make Paul's letter.

In today's Epistle, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. As you can see in much of his correspondence with this church, he was often having to correct them for their strange practices (or unorthodox.)

In this part of his letter, Paul is telling the Corinthians about the nature of the body of Christ. He uses as an analogy – the human body. In doing so, he talks about how every part of the body needs the other parts and that each part plays a vital role in the proper functioning of the whole.

Apparently, some of the Corinthians felt that they were more special or more important than others. Paul makes the point that, just as the human body needs all its parts to fully function, so does the body of Christ.

Of course Paul's analogy from around 50 AD works just as well today as it did when he wrote his letter. For just as those early Christians were members of the body of Christ, so we too are members of that body.

Now, of course, sometimes we have great fun, guessing what part of the body of Christ each of us might be. Might I be an arm or a leg, a

hand or a foot – maybe a part that is unmentionable? Well, guess what? All parts are needed and necessary.

So it is that whatever your particular gifts and talents might be – they are needed in this part of the body of Christ. Somehow what you can and have to offer is of use to the work of God in this place.

Today (if you go/went to the adult Sunday School) you will, or you have heard about the persons nominated for vestry at Holy Comforter. These are persons who are willing to offer their gifts and talents for use in our church by serving on the vestry. We owe them a debt of gratitude for offering themselves in this way. Only five will be elected from those nominated – be sure to say “Thank You” for all who have offered themselves for consideration.

One gift that we all have is that of our resources – our financial resources. Some of us have far more than others. Some of us have far more potential than others in terms of earning power. Some of us live off of the fruits of our previous labors and our means are fixed by pensions and Social Security.

As we are nearing the end of our Annual Giving Campaign, it is time all of us to make our financial commitment known. We need to hear from everyone now so that we can know where we stand in terms of paying for the variety of ministries that occur in this place.

In that regard, I am sure that some of us may be in a difficult situation financially -- -- some of us may be facing uncertainty, or have unexpected expenses. We still need to hear from you – even if you have to reduce or not even pledge. We need to know where we stand, and your response will help -- and you will not have to receive a follow-up call.

I am also sure that some of us are doing fairly well, even in these somewhat difficult times. If that is the case, it is time for us to step up with increased giving in order to fund our ministries and also to help make up for the potential loss from those whose circumstances are not as fortunate.

No matter where you are in all those possible scenarios – do this – turn in your pledge, so we can get about the business of ministry.

Of course we also want you to offer your time and talent to the body of Christ known as Holy Comforter Church. You see we are a body and we all have parts to play – roles to fulfill – vital functions to perform in the ministry of this place.

Another reason that I remember Corinth so well has to do with the worship service we held there.

We were looking for a place to have the Eucharist. There was not a convenient church building or even ‘visitors’ center’ that was conducive for us to use.

Finally we decided to use one of the large marble ruins – part of what was at one time a large column. It was about as big round as a 55 gallon drum – (this big.)

We set out our communion vessels and plates – chalice and paten on a linen corporal on top of this large round stone.

We stood around the stone in a circle and we remembered our story. We remembered the story of how our Lord came among us and loved us and died for us – and before he died, gave specific instructions to his friends on how they should remember him – and we were doing it.

We remembered our ancient brother Paul and we read some of his letter to our forebears in the ‘sin city’ Corinth. We recalled how probably not all of them had led what we would call ‘pure and saintly lives.’ We remembered that we, too, had lives that were not always what we would like for them to have been. And then we offered our confession and praise and shared the holy meal in the sure confidence that God’s love was far more powerful and life giving than any of the regretful events of our collective past.

I want to offer you that same assurance on this Lord’s Day. God loves you – that’s right God loves you – you and you – all of you. Just like I used to tell those folks at the jail in Winston-Salem, “God loves you. There is nothing you have done or ever will do that will make God stop loving you.”

O you can reject that love – you can turn your back – you can try to walk away – but God’s going to love you. No matter who, what, and where you are, God is going to love you.

As we celebrate that love – that ‘blessed assurance’ - let us share in this Holy Meal in which Jesus promises to be with us. Let us share and in doing so once again offer our gifts and talents to God – let us remember that we are indeed members of the body of Christ and heirs of his Eternal Kingdom.