



Second Sunday after the Epiphany

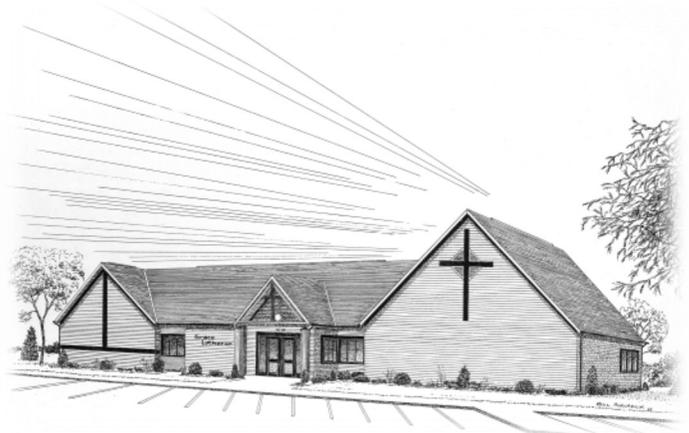
January 19, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

GRACE AND PEACE

ARE YOURS



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

Do you believe that? Do we really understand and appreciate that greeting, or any of the others spoken before the sermon? It's easy to let the words of the greeting wash over us without thinking about them every time the pastor says grace and peace from God. In fact, it's even easy for the pastor to say them without much thought, without really appreciating what he's saying. Do we really take to heart the greeting before a sermon and believe that they are spoken to us and have meaning for us? Paul speaks them with a lot of thought and a lot of care and a lot of faith that those words, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," really, truly, and absolutely applied to the Corinthians. He had to believe that those words applied to them, because he starts with this grace and peace even though he speaks a very harsh message to them for a countless number of sins that most would consider "unbefitting" of Christians, of believers.

That's probably what we would say also, isn't it? Wouldn't we say that the sins the Corinthians fell into were unbefitting of a Christian? The sins were rather heinous: incest, divisions between rich and poor, denying the very resurrection of Jesus, lawsuits between believers, sexual immorality, improper use of the Lord's Supper, no love, abusing

spiritual gifts. The list goes on. We, along with any other believer, might speak up about these things and say, "A Christian doesn't do that." But if we say that, we really miss the point.

How can Christians do such things? Well, because of the sinful nature. It was alive and well among the Corinthians, that's clear. And it's alive and well among us too, isn't it? We don't give thanks to our God always because of the grace of God given in Christ Jesus as Paul says we should. No, far more often we get down about our situation. Why doesn't our church grow? Why do we have so many straying members? Why do we have to struggle through our sickness, through our pain and disease and loss? Instead of focusing on everything that we have been given by God through Christ, we often focus on all the things that he hasn't given us in this life. Far from giving thanks to our God always because of his grace, we too often say, "Thanks for nothing," because of the pain, the sorrow, the trouble, and the hardship he has given to us instead. Has our speech been enriched in him, or have our backs been turned to him instead? Do we joy to learn more about our God every chance we get, or do we go on thinking that bible study just isn't for me. After all, I've learned all there is to know about it, or at least I've learned the basics which is all that really matters anyway.

These things are unbefitting of Christians, of believers, of the new person that has been created inside of each one of us at baptism. By all rights those words of the greeting, "Grace to you and



peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” they have no place being spoken to you and to me, just as they really had no place being spoken to the Corinthians in view of all those sins.

And yet, this is the very first thing Paul says to them. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul starts with grace. He starts with peace. Paul connects the people to their God through Jesus Christ. Paul includes the people as members of the one holy Christian church, the invisible church made up of all believers. Paul makes it clear to these people that they too were part of those who have been made holy and washed clean in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Paul makes it clear that these people were sanctified, that is made perfect in God’s sight, by Christ Jesus. Before Paul addresses any of the issues that he had to talk to the Corinthians about, he first and foremost addresses them as who they really were: forgiven sinners and God’s children, bought and paid for by Jesus himself.

Paul did the very same thing that John the Baptist did in the Gospel this morning. He pointed the people to God. “Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Did you happen to notice or maybe even count how many times the words *Jesus Christ* or *Christ Jesus* came up in these first nine verses of Paul’s letter? 8 times! Could Paul have been any clearer? “Look, Jesus Christ, who has enriched you by dying on the cross and by taking away your sin.” “Look, Jesus Christ, who has made you guiltless and will sustain you until he comes again.” “Look, Jesus Christ, who has called you into his fellowship and who is faithful.” Those things were all true of the Corinthians. And those things are all true of you and me too.

That gives us power, doesn’t it? It gives us power to face the difficulties of this life. It is this truth about our connection to Christ that gives us the strength to face the most difficult situations, even cancer, or the loss of a job, or the loss of a house, or the loss of a spouse. No matter what may happen to us in this life we still have that same

connection to our Savior, to Jesus Christ. We still are called holy and are sanctified in him. We still have the confidence in God’s faithfulness to sustain us to the end, to keep us guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful. And it is into this God that we have been baptized, that we have been connected, and that we have been pointed to by Paul. Nothing can separate us from this God because of Christ Jesus. It is because of this connection to Jesus that we can at all times and in every situation give thanks to God, as Paul does in verse 4. It’s this connection to Christ that gives us an eternal perspective that looks forward to heaven with our Savior, knowing that he has something far greater than the riches of this life in store for us in the life to come. He has perfection—he has eternity—he has the true riches of heaven itself all in store for us through Jesus.

Greetings and votums, those are the technical terms for what a pastor says at the beginning and end of the sermon every Sunday. They are words spoken about peace and about grace through God and Jesus Christ. They are words spoken to praise and thank God for what he has done and for what he has made us through Christ. May we always take them to heart because they are always words that apply to us, God’s people. Amen.

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD