

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3.1-9
Date: February 13, 2011
Service: 6 Epiphany
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Palatka, FL
The Rev. Canon James M. Dorn III, Rector

We are God's servants, working together.

Do you wish to have good and stable relationships with your friends, your family, your spouse, your brothers and sisters in Christ, and with God?

If you answered, 'yes', then you know nothing good or stable is ever obtained without some effort by both parties. If you answered, 'no', then you prefer and perhaps enjoy the gloom and discomfort that comes from unhealthy and unstable relationships.

The Church is comprised of people in relationship with God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and people in relationship with each other. Both relationships take time and effort by God and by us in order for us to be constructed into the individuals and the Church, God longingly desires us to become. But we live in a 'we want it right now society' and we have forgotten how to wait, let alone wait patiently; unless we are at Disney or Universal Orlando. Impatience and inactivity will inevitably cause us to act like the Corinthians, quarreling and not wanting to work together and when we do work together, well someone, typically the one who does the least, always wants to take credit for what has been done instead of saying, "Thank you Jesus for us being able to work together in your name."

Six years ago to the day, I preached my first sermon, celebrated at our first Eucharist together, and we all longed and hoped for a brighter future as a Church and as a city. The times then were abuzz with excitement but future growth and as the years went by, the church stabilized as the city plummeted into massive unemployment and even greater poverty. And yet even though we became complacent and we like to grumble about not having any money, we held our own, continued to reach out in the Name of Jesus Christ and we have been blessed with unexpectedly greater giving to the Lord than in any previous year, this means our work and God's work within us has just begun. Our work as a community of faithful Christians is still an open field always in need of tilling, planting, or watering so that God can build where we have worked but if we are not careful we might commit the greatest sin of all, doing nothing.

We are Jesus Christ's workers in the world and when we complain, when we become discouraged things aren't going fast enough, or when we do not understand why God is working things out the way He is these words from Reinhold Niebuhr might help us put our circumstances into perspective:

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime;
therefore, we are saved by hope.

Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate-context of history;
therefore, we are saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be

accomplished alone;
therefore, we are saved by love.

No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the stand
point of our friend or foe as from our own;
therefore, we are saved by the final form of love
—which is forgiveness.

Forgiveness of our sins by Jesus Christ enables us to live in heaven and when we forgive those who sin against us we are blessed with a portion of heaven on Earth called grace and peace. However, when we refuse to forgive or we are not forgiven by Jesus Christ, then we become bottled up with anger and become guilt ridden slowly rotting in an Earthly Hell waiting day by day for eternal Hell to become a reality.

In life, we have the choice to live in either Heaven or Hell and which one we choose to live in all depends on us being God's servants, working together. This old story lays out for us the difference between living a life in Hell or a life in Heaven.

One night, a woman had a dream, and in the dream an angel came and took her on a tour of Heaven and Hell.

The first place the angel took her was to Hell, which turned out to be a huge elegantly decorated banquet room with tables full of all the food and drink one could want. But amid such beauty and plenty, the people sitting at the tables were not happy. Instead they are angry, frustrated, rude, despairing, depressed, stressed, thin, emaciated, and wasting away because the silverware in hell is about four feet long and can only be picked up at one end. And since Hell is full of people who are only interested in feeding themselves, they are unable to manage a four-foot utensil in such a way as to bring the food filled end to their own mouth.

Then after what seemed to be an eternity of watching people suffering in their own misery, the angel and the woman leave Hell and go to Heaven.

Heaven it turns out is exactly like Hell, a huge elegantly decorated banquet room, with tables full of all the food and drink you could want. But in Heaven, unlike Hell, the people in heaven are joyful, happy, content, involved, and have a healthy sense of well-being. As the woman enjoyed watching the people in Heaven, she noticed the silverware is exactly the same as in hell, about four feet long and can only be picked up at one end.

Amazed at the people in Heaven and Hell being so different when their surroundings were exactly the same, the woman asks the angel, "What is the difference?" The angel replies, "The people in heaven are interested in each other more than they are interested in themselves, so they use the utensils to reach across the table and feed each other."

The Church, is at its best when it follows God's Commandments, is not jealous of others, does not quarrel, and when it works together to reach out into its community and into the world, feeding the lonely, the poor, and the heartbroken with Christ's love and when necessary giving them food, drink, and shelter. In the month's ahead, let us be the best we can be working together for the common goal of

bringing the love of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him.

Let us pray,

Dear Lord, let the light of your countenance shine upon us and pour your blessings into our souls, may our minds rejoice in their enlightenment, may we see ever more clearly our way through life, and may we be gladdened by the wondrous showing of our holy faith to all nations beginning with our community. Amen.

Gothic Breviary (7th Century) modified.