

Professor Carla Works asks us to “Imagine that you spent a year and a half getting a new church up and going. When you left to tend to other missions, the church was growing. Leaders were emerging, and the congregation was relatively healthy. All seemed well when you moved away to serve God in other ways.

Then, a delegation from the young church arrives at your new home. The delegation brings a letter full of questions and unresolved issues, and the letter carries some distressing news. The church is fighting. The factions are visible.

Some are in danger of going back to their former lives to serve their former gods and to resume life as they once knew it. Others are lording their so-called knowledge over those whom they deem weaker in the faith. Class divisions are visible -- even at the Lord’s Table.

To make matters worse, you hear secret reports that involve church members visiting prostitutes and a man sleeping with his stepmom. Some are even questioning the resurrection -- the very heart of the gospel! The problems are overwhelming and unrelenting.

You cannot go visit the church now. But the delegation is awaiting your response. And respond you must. You begin thinking about all that you want to say to this congregation.

Where do you even begin? How are you supposed to address all these problems in one letter? How did things go so wrong?”

This is the description of Paul’s world. “The text for this week is the opening of the letter that is Paul’s response to a church in crisis. Contrary to how we title this letter, though, 1st Corinthians was not his first piece of written correspondence to this church.

Paul refers to a previous letter, a letter containing instructions which they apparently misunderstood. Letter writing, like email and texts, always runs a risk of misinterpretation. Paul must now correct that misunderstanding in this current letter as well as respond to what he knows about the church's problems."

Read I Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul affirms three very important points to this congregation in Corinth. He tells them that they are a very gifted congregation. Paul tells them that these gifts are from God. And Paul tells them that they need to be patiently waiting for the further revealing of God. As I read these words from Paul I can't help but think about Allison Creek Presbyterian Church and the people who are connected to this important ministry.

Like what Paul says to the church in Corinth, you too are a very gifted body of believers. I look out and see the impact that you make in the community where you live. I see teachers, coaches, and administrators who spend the week teaching young people skills that will guide them throughout life that go beyond their subject matter. I hear reports back about the impact that you are making and the lives that are transformed.

I see students in elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and graduate school who know the importance of maintaining ethical standards when so many around them seek the short cut and cheat.

I see business women and men who carry out their tasks at work with integrity. I hear your stories of how you deal with matters at work and I am thankful for the ways that you carry your Christian values in how you treat others in the workplace.

I listen to your stories of working as small business owners, salespeople, or in middle and upper management and the frustrations and challenges and stresses that this involves especially as you try to balance family life with work demands.

I see doctors and other professionals that use their skill sets to help the most vulnerable in our community and around the world. It makes my job as a pastor so much easier when I feel free to contact you and bring a local or national or international need to your attention and you immediately respond to bring help and witness.

I see stay-at-home parents who devote their life to making important sacrifices to change diapers, transport their children all around the area for school and other activities, and remain home to teach their children from elementary through high school.

I see people in the service industries like banks, hospitals and other health care facilities who lovingly respond to the needs of their clients or patients or customers. Some of you have to deal with very antagonistic people in your places of employment but you handle it by being guided by core Christian values.

And I see people in retirement who are not giving up their use of gifts but instead using and developing new skills or gifts to serve others in the community and in the church. I look out and see an incredible gifted group of people.

The second big point that Paul makes in this passage is that these gifts that you possess are from God. We can nurture and develop these gifts, but they are ultimately from God. God is the source of all that is good in us and we come into worship to remind ourselves of this.

Being part of a church community should be a constant reminder that it is not about us but that it is about God. We should come to worship with an attitude of submission to God and a thankfulness to God. By being in worship we are reminded to look outside of ourselves to the goodness of God in our lives.

And the third point Paul makes in our reading this morning that applies to us as well is that we need to be patiently waiting for the further revealing of God. God has chosen, for whatever reason, to bring this group of people together at this time and in this place. God is choosing to bring this group of incredibly talented and diverse people together to do more together than we can do on our own.

Coming together to accomplish more together rather than we can accomplish alone is a good explanation of why it is important to be an active part of a church community. Yes, coming together to be a church together leads to conflicts and disappointments. That is what Paul addresses in this letter to the church in Corinth.

But coming together as a church community also is an acknowledgement that we can do more together than we can do alone. We grow in our relationship with God in our relationships with others. Waiting patiently for God's revelation means being open to what God is using us for in the future.

I was recently meeting with a fellow pastor and church consultant and I was describing Allison Creek Church. He said something which made sense to me about why and how we need to move forward as a congregation. He said that what is important for this congregation is that we need to help more people experience what God has already given to a small group of you.

If we listen to Paul's words, then during this season of Advent we wait patiently but with purpose to be open to what God is revealing to us and how we are called to help more people experience what God has already given to us here.

We cannot become a clique that remains our same size because that is not faithful. We cannot ignore the spiritual and physical needs of young people in our community because that leads to a slow death. We cannot ignore the spiritual and physical needs of our elderly because that leads to losing their wisdom.

God has gifted us with many wonderful gifts. During this season of Advent, we can patiently and diligently pray for God to reveal to us how we are called to expand the impact that we are called to make in the spiritual and physical lives of people personally, locally, and globally.

There is purpose and power in the waiting. AMEN.

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-Works, Carla, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3483

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