

EMORY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sunday, August 14, 2005

I Corinthians 1:1-9

*To the Saints at Emory*

Sermon from Rev. Sharon Taylor

Jill's summer sermon series on saints at times has been fascinating, then again, encouraging and inspiring. I have been edified and spurred on in my spiritual journey by the witness of the saints whom Jill has brought before us. It's helpful for us to know other persons worthy of our emulation...role models...heroes and sheroes of the faith.

In keeping with the saintly theme of the sermon series, I thought that I would find a saint, too; but instead I landed on the introductory verses of Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth, I Corinthians 1:1-9. This is an early letter, written about A.D. 55. The Church was brand-spanking new. Those newly converted believers at Corinth were a hodge-podge of Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slave and free, educated and ignorant, young and old, married and single----unlike any other social organization of that time, but very much like their world of commerce and trade.

You know, if you want any of that far eastern silk, you're gonna have to do business with those far eastern foreigners.

And if you want any of that elephant ivory, you're gonna have to do business with those Africans.

If you want any of those exotic spices, you're gonna have to do business with those orientals.

You can do business with them, but you don't have to socialize with them, and you don't have to worship with them.

Something was odd about the people who were professing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They were a motley assortment of people in an unexpected association....called Church.

What brought them together, and what kept them together?

- 1) they were sanctified in Christ Jesus,
- 2) and they were called to be saints—together with all those who in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

What these people had in common was their status in Jesus Christ and a shared calling to be saints.

Their new status in Christ was “sanctified”---freed from sin, purified, made holy, consecrated. The new status indicates movement or change:

From unclean to clean; from profane to holy;  
from bound by sin to freed from sin;  
from old person to new person in Christ;  
from lost to found;  
from separated from God to reconciled to God through Christ;  
from outside the circle of God’s family to inside the circle of God’s family;  
from orphan to adopted child of God.

To the Church of God, to those who are *sanctified in Christ Jesus*. The Church was an association of persons who had been transformed by Jesus Christ. They weren’t who they used to be; they were now sanctified, made holy, new, consecrated in Christ Jesus.

And they were now *called to be saints*. My mom was a sister to John Calvin. I mean she had that whole Reformation against the Roman Catholic theology. “Catholics,” she said, “pray to saints. You don’t have to go through anybody to pray. You pray directly to God. You don’t need any dead saint.”

Well, she was right. But some of us Protestants still have a bit of a rub with the concept of “saints.” Our image of saints can be straight out of Medieval artwork. Saints look ancient, and are (were) holier-than-thou-average-decent-human-being; lived a joyless, ascetic lifestyle; in poverty; asexual; old maybe; dead likely. Our image of a saint is anyone but me, of course, or you.

However, Paul rounds up all those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and says that they are *called to be saints*.

Paul rounds up all of us who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and says that we are *called to be saints*.

I don’t think that we Presbyterians can have a conversation without using the words “call” or “calling.” The idea of God calling us is bound up with our

belief in the sovereignty and providence of God. We belong to God and God's call is our duty, honor, and privilege to fulfill.

It is God who issues the call: *be saints*. "You have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, now be saints."

Such a call may elicit an Abraham or Sarah-like giggle.... "Oh, God, you have to be kidding!" "I, of course, could never be a bonafide saint!-----Or could I?" "What do you have to do?"

First, know that you are not a solo saint; we're part of a sainthood, an association of saints; *called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours*. This is the communion of saints that is in the Apostles' Creed. We're called by God to be saints *together*. There is no Church of One, or Communion of Saint, singular. We are called by God to be saints together. Right here, at Emory, is a local association of God's called saints.

Secondly, God gives us saints together-- grace---which is always sufficient--and God enriches the saints constantly, giving spiritual gifts to build up the saints and to do God's work in the world. (That's from verses 4 through 7.) *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in Him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you---so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift...*

You know, Paul is going to go on in this letter and confront/tackle a number of problems, conflicts, and issues in the Corinthian church... Yet he addresses the Church as *those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, gifted with God's grace, enriched in every in Christ Jesus, not lacking in any spiritual gift*.

Now I'm thinking that our calling to be saints isn't about being superhuman....it's about staying together and continuing to grow in Christ...and practicing the spiritual gifts God has given us....Each one of us has a place in this association of saints; each one of us can cultivate our relationship with Christ; and each of us have gifts, talents, and skills to share that help God's association of saints to thrive.

Finally, Paul encourages the Church to maintain hope in *the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will preserve and strengthen us to the end, so that we may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Have you ever heard such good news? God has claimed us so completely that even when a final judgment is rendered, the saints, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, will be declared forgiven and freed---blameless—in Christ.

To the Church of God that is here at Emory, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.