

Teach Your Children Well
I Corinthians 3:1-9
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church, Clemson, SC
February 12, 2017

I hope you know this call and response. “God is good.” “All the time.” “All the time.” “God is good.” Repeat.

This is a true saying and one we should teach our children. If they believe this about God, it will serve them well even in difficult times and places.

One difficult community was that surrounding the Corinthian church. It was rife with social and political opinions and problems. Corinth was known in the ancient world as a “Sin City” with political allegiances and social mores that were significantly unbecoming for Christians.

In fact, Paul describes the factions in the church there using the same language of the political groups in the city-states. The politics of the day might seem like ours where rival groups were labeled by the names of their leaders, those whom they would follow.

Historians note that one might be in a faction of Marius or the Party of Pompey or any number of other groups who followed the “wise.” The wise were associated with the party leaders who were always the wealthiest members of society. “In the handbook of electioneering attributed to Quintus Cicero, the candidate is advised to make friends among the upper classes, but to avoid taking a stand on public issues.”ⁱ

Party spirit was *so prevalent* that it was creeping into the church and it was probably not too surprising as these were new converts to the faith whose lives had been full of the ways of the fleshy Corinthian life. One church family sent word to Paul about the many concerns of wisdom, Gnosticism, conflicts over meals, factions, and issues that were plaguing the church. Within the church Paul called these allegiances factions which caused schisms—divisions in the body of Christ.

Someone once told me that “*Church people are monogamous. They can only love one staff member at a time.*” But imagine what it would be like if some here today were to say “I belong to Laura” or “I belong to Dana” or “I belong to Al” or “I belong to Mary.” Who are we that you should belong to us? We all belong to God. We are servants of God, working together, and united in Christ for his glory.

Even though Paul and Apollos had different approaches and tasks that they did, both were servants of God on behalf of the church. Paul was not about to let the people create such divisions and neither are we. It can happen easily though. So Paul breaks down these false allegiances and says our allegiance is only to Christ. Even before it was cool to be “all in” here, Paul tells us we are all in “in Christ.”

Paul and Apollos are co-workers with God. Paul planted churches, Apollos taught them, God grew them and continues to grow them and will continue to grow them. The verbs for Paul and Apollos’ work are past tense, but the verb for God’s work is imperfect tense which means it is on-going, never stopping. God’s imperfect tense work is to grow into maturity or perfection, completion, the disciples in the Corinthian church and here at Fort Hill and in other

Christian churches. Just as Paul and Apollos had particular gifts to share, so do we. Each of us has something to share with the church. Together we serve with God.

If there are factions in the church, then that is a sign of immaturity, of immature faith. Paul even calls them *infants* saying they are only able to drink milk and nothing more substantial. They are not spiritual, but only of the flesh, mere humans.

If adults create factions in the church, it is likely that their children will do the same or they may realize the misplaced allegiance and leave the church entirely when they are older. Kids are the best hypocrisy radars ever, especially in the church and society. However, children, too, are adept at recognizing the face of God. Harvard child psychiatrist Robert Coles in his book *The Spiritual Lives of Children* tells the story of an 8 year old black girl in NC in 1962 as the civil rights era was boiling. Here is her story.

“I was all alone, and those [segregationist] people were screaming, and suddenly I saw God smiling, and I smiled ... A woman was standing there [near the school door], and she shouted at me, ‘Hey, you little nigger n-word, what you smiling at?’ I looked right at her face, and I said, ‘At God.’ Then she looked up at the sky, and then she looked at me, and she didn’t call me anymore names.”ⁱⁱ

All of us can learn to look for God, to grow from mere humans into spiritual persons. Paul called them “infants in Christ” which gives us hope. Paul talks about children a lot in his letters to churches and here he sets out expectations for growth—to grow into adulthood—to maturity, into perfection. What Paul says is, “Don’t be satisfied with baby faith, grow up. You are infants in Christ, grow up in Christ and become full disciples who learn and live in the way of Christ and be about nurturing, cultivating the faith in one another. That’s being God’s field. Encourage one another. That’s being God’s building.”

My father’s first name was George. The name George means gardener. Daddy grew up on a farm. He knew how to garden. When I was growing up we lived in the city and our yard backed up to some woods. Daddy knew the man who owned the woods and asked if he could plant some gardens on the land. So we had an upper and a lower garden for many years, yielding all kinds of vegetables. Then as my father aged, we kept the upper garden and then made a garden right in our back yard. I can remember from a very young age helping him plant seeds in the furrows. I loved to play in water so he would let me water the seeds. I learned how to do it so the seeds would not wash away. Waiting for the first sprouts to emerge from the soil was always hard, but once those little green shoots would pop up, it was amazing to watch them grow each day. The sunshine always made them grow.

Paul planted seeds of faith about Christ crucified and risen—that was his gift for church. Apollos watered—he taught the people how to be disciples. But God gave the growth. Paul and Apollos each played a role, but God was there all along the way and continues—God is with us, with the body, the church all the time.

So growing up in the faith in Christ takes some work. We don’t complete it at confirmation. It is a life-long process, that growing us by God. You can **know** the Bible, but if you do not nurture that knowledge in the body of Christ, you will not grow in Christ. Paul

challenges the church to move beyond milk, to solid food in the faith. If we do not increase our palate, we will never learn some things about God, the church, or ourselves. “There are many Christians in our congregations who have been in the church all their lives but apart from a Sunday sermon they have not exercised their spiritual appetite since Sunday school.”ⁱⁱⁱ

You are God’s field, God’s building. These are nouns, but growing is a verb and one grows into becoming a disciple by the processes of planting the seed of the Word, cultivating that spirit in Christ, and doing all this work alongside God who gives the growth. The Christian life is not a product, but a process, a way of living in Christ.

When the chaos of culture enters into the church it often changes the church for the worse, making it less of church, misplacing its identity in Christ for a false allegiance to someone else. This happens when faith is immature.

But when faith is mature, it does not fear, and the church enters into the chaos of the culture. The church has the capacity in Christ to change the culture for the better, making it less of a culture of chaos and more of a culture of calm, the peace of Christ.

At maturity, the Christian goes out into the world and plants God’s seeds of mercy, cultivating them with compassion, love, and justice so that the fruit of more Christian lives are born to do the same.

At Old Stone Church this past Thanksgiving, I shared a prayer with those present. It is a children’s prayer and I think it speaks to this work of discipleship—planting, cultivating, and sharing the bounty of God’s love. Please join me repeating the words and hand motions to this open eye prayer.

First comes the seed and then the grain.

Thank you, God, for the sun and the rain.

First comes the flour and then the bread.

Thank you, God, for being fed.

Thank you, God, for all your care.

Help us all to share and share. Amen.

(Children and others come forward to lead Vision and Values affirmation.)

Last year our church created a Vision statement for Children’s Ministry. This Vision statement and its accompanying values are about cultivating young disciples so that they grow up in Christ. Paul lets us know this does not happen by accident. He views himself as a father figure to his churches, and from the beginning of the church and even until now parents are still the primary faith educators of their children.

Parents, what you believe about Jesus Christ and how you live that out your beliefs as a follower of Jesus Christ are the strongest ways you plant seeds of faith in your children. The next strongest faith educators are your fellow pilgrims of faith in this church.

Paul modeled for us that the parent needs help in this cultivating of faith. Apollos worked alongside him. Others participated in teaching and nurturing faith. Your children can have that experience, too. Being present in the body of Christ, the church is how that happens. More than milk is served.

I have invited some children and parents and grandparents and friends to lead us in our affirmation of faith. I would like for you to remain seated so that you can see the children.

*The Children's Ministry believes Fort Hill Presbyterian Church is
is a place for children to have fun learning about Jesus,
exploring their faith in God,
creating lasting friendships, and
making the world better.*

We value

Faith: We worship and follow Jesus because he loves us.

Safe Place: We create a space where we are protected.

Caring: We listen to each other to help.

Loving Church Family: We are baptized into God's family and loved by everyone at church "all the time!"

Respect: We will make choices so everybody feels loved.

Honesty: We try to be ourselves in all we do!

Welcoming: We greet everyone as a friend.

Joy: We are happy because God loves us "all the time!"

ⁱ L. L. Welborn, "On the Discord in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Ancient Politic,." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 85, no. 111, 1987, 85- 91. Welborn cites Quintus Cicero (Comm. Pet. 53), 92. This whole article is fascinating in light of today's American politics.

ⁱⁱ Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 19-20. [] indicates Coles insertion for explanation. ~~Strikethrough~~ indicates my editorial choice for proclamation knowing children would be present.

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Lockhart, "1 Corinthians 3 A healthy diet," *A different heresy exploring faith & spirituality in a pluralistic world*, February 14, 2014, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://revplockhart.blogspot.com.au/2014/02/1-corinthians-3-healthy-diet.html>.