



Second Sunday After Epiphany

January 15, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: The Church Is What It Is Because It Is Christ's Church

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1 (NIV)

¹ Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— ⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.



In the almost thirty years that I've been a WELS pastor, I've had the privilege of preaching and teaching in Nigeria, Nepal and the Ukraine as well as in several states across the country. The customs and cultures of these people and places vary dramatically, but one truth is always the same: God loves each and every one of His children equally no matter their ethnicity, skin color or native tongue. When Jesus gave His disciple, John, a vision of heaven's citizens, it included people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" who were praising Jesus because He'd rescued them from death and hell (Rev. 5:9& 7:9). The Christian Church consists of "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours," as Paul puts it in our text. Those who have received the goal of their faith—eternal life with God in the mansions of His heavenly home—are members of the *Church Triumphant*. Here on earth, we're part of the *Church Militant*, because we're locked in mortal combat with our arch enemy, the devil, and the sinful desires of our flesh and the enticing temptations of this fallen world. Yet God vows that He won't let us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13).

In the **Apostles' Creed** we confess that we believe in "the Holy Christian Church." The next phrase in that ancient statement of faith—"the communion of saints"—is explanatory: "the Holy Christian Church" is "the communion of saints." They're one and the same. Theologians call this the **Una Sancta**—the "one Church." While members of the **Una Sancta** are scattered across the globe, it's common for them to form local congregations like ours to meet regularly for Bible study, fellowship, worship and acts of service. In fact, in the Book of Acts we read that the first century believers in Jerusalem "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread"—referring to the Lord's Supper—"and to prayer" (2:42). They were called "the church"—small "c"—"in Jerusalem."

We call the **Una Sancta** the Holy Christian Church not just because it's made up of Christians, but also because it's centered on Christ, who is present among His people. He pledged that "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20). It is the Holy Christian Church because Christ builds it—sanctifies it, blesses it and sustains it. It's His Church! Put frankly,

THE CHURCH IS WHAT IT IS BECAUSE IT IS CHRIST'S CHURCH!

Do you think that the Corinthians were ashamed when they heard how Paul addressed them in the opening words of his letter? Paul referred to them as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy." But their consciences might've screamed that they were anything but saints in God's sight! Their church was plagued by divisive cliques, jealousy and strife. They were suing each other in court and proudly tolerating sexual immorality among their members. Their worship services had denigrated into displays of selfishness and a total lack of reverence for the sanctity of the Lord's Supper. How on earth could Paul

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call these people “**holy**” and “**sanctified**”—which means “set apart by God for His sacred purposes”? These same questions can be asked about us who are gathered here.

Sadly, you and I resemble the people of this world far too frequently. The ways in which we behave in public—or behind closed doors at home—confirm the fact that the same sinful nature that governs the motives and actions of unbelievers govern ours all too often too. They steal, we steal. They lust, we lust. They lash out in anger, and so do we. They abuse their loved ones, and we follow suit. We bicker with and backstab our brothers and sisters in Christ; we slander other’s good names and strive after earthly things rather than the things of heaven. On the surface, there’s often no clear distinction between us and those who don’t know where their daily bread comes from or which side it’s buttered on. How shameful!

Thank God that the holiness of the Church doesn’t depend on those who walk in the door, for as King Solomon wrote, “**there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins**” (Eccl. 7:9). God alone *is* holy and He alone *makes* holy. Objectively speaking, God “**reconciled the world to himself in Christ**” (2 Cor. 5:19a) through the work Jesus did to meet that need for mankind. Jesus satisfied every single obligation of God’s Law in our place. He died with the full weight of our sins charged to His account, paying for them completely. Three days after His friends laid His lifeless body in a rock tomb and blocked its entrance with a massive stone, He emerged from that sepulcher, alive again! Jesus’ perfect life, His innocent death and His glorious resurrection all contributed to the eternal redemption of our fallen race! The major blessings He won thru His redemptive work include the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God and eternal life in heaven—along with countless others. God’s Word assures us that “**there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**” (Rom. 8:1a). The moment the Spirit brought us to faith in Jesus, we became unimpeachable in God’s eyes!

Faith in Jesus makes us and folks around the world—past, present and future—members of the ***Una Sancta***, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints!

After acknowledging the Corinthians’ status as holy in Christ Jesus, St. Paul also gives thanks to God for them “**because of his grace given [them] in Christ Jesus.**” He adds, “**For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**” Like Paul, I also give thanks to God for you, the flock of believers He has entrusted to my spiritual care. God has blessed you with a good understanding of and appreciation for sound doctrine as well as the spiritual gifts that are necessary in order for Living Hope to function as a fully-equipped oasis of grace in Redmond, Washington. The souls of many who live in the neighborhoods near our church are parched. They thirst for the “**living water**” that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. Jesus told her, “**Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life**” (John 4:11, 14).

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Friends, what are we doing—what are we *going to do*—in 2017 to see to it that our neighbors know who we are, what we believe and what we have to offer for their spiritual welfare?

Look at Living Hope as a giant reservoir of God’s grace—of the “**living water**” of Jesus Christ that the people of our surrounding community desperately need in order to receive the blessings that Jesus won for them as much as He did for us. How can we reach out to our neighbors so that they don’t die of thirst only to spend eternity in the fires of hell where they—the damned—will long for a single drop of water to “**cool [their] tongue, because**” they will be “**in agony**” (Luke 16:24)? It’s not enough for us to sit back and lament their fate. We must come up with workable solutions to this dilemma that harness *all* of our spiritual gifts.

So what will those strategies be? Permit me to run a few past you that I’ve come up with. What about a fair in the summer with a bounce-house, pony rides, games, a barbecue and our praise band? Or a cultural event in February featuring the food, dress and customs of the various ethnic backgrounds of our members and preschool families? Maybe a fall arts and crafts fair? Or our spring plant swap? Could we set aside part of our campus for a community garden or small-side soccer fields or let a youth basketball league, an adult coed volleyball league or a children’s theatre group use this worship space? How about some good old fashioned door-to-door outreach like we did last spring when many of us were trained by Dave Malnes of *Praise and Proclaim Ministries* in a simple and effective technique to share the good news with others? Or after-school homework help for the elementary school or Jr. High students from across the street? The options are limited only by our imagination and our efforts to roll up our sleeves and get busy.

Friends, the Church is what it is because it is *Christ’s* Church. And Christ has commissioned His Church of every age and place to “**go and make disciples of all nations**” by “**baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**” and by “**teaching them to obey everything [He] has commanded us**” (Matt. 28:19-20). That’s really the reason for our calling: to share Jesus with others any way we can. God didn’t sacrifice His only Son so we could enjoy the blessings He won for us and not do what we can to share those blessings with others. Jesus plainly states: “**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me**” (Mark 8:34). Self-denial *is* cross-bearing for Christ. It’s putting Him first, others second and yourself last. Jesus honors such humble service *because* it honors Him; He blesses it *because* it blesses others in His name.

As we bear our crosses in His behalf and in behalf of His kingdom, the Apostle Paul promises us in the closing words of our sermon text that God “**will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**” That promise, like all of God’s promises, is a promise you can depend on as you go out the doors of this church today and into God’s world to do His work! Amen.

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