

Sermon

Epiphany 5 Year B

The Epistle 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

The Gospel Mark 1:29-39

After Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Prayer:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

– AMEN

Sermon:

“I have become all things to all people”.

St. Paul wrote those words more than 2000 years ago.

Even if people are waiting for Jesus 10,000 years from now,
There will never be a better description of a Christian’s vocation.

When Paul showed up in Corinth, to start a new church,
people had already been living there for 1,000 years. ⁱ

Ancient Corinth was a remarkably busy place.

Its ruins are close to modern Corinth, 50 miles west of Athens.
It’s really beautiful.ⁱⁱ

St. Paul may have spent several years in Corinth.

We cannot be sure as to the time frames,ⁱⁱⁱ

But his letters tell us that he came and went three times.

Whenever he came, and then left,

he wrote letters to the new Christians in Corinth^{iv}
to follow up on his work.

Paul learned^v that the sophisticated Christians in Corinth,
Had sophisticated problems.

The early Christians in Corinth

Lived in a world as pagan as is ours today.

Just like us, they had to make difficult choices,
If they were going to follow The Lord.

In his long letters, Paul tried to tell how they should live.

Just like us, they had to make difficult choices.

For example, in Chapter 8, ^{vi} Paul says that it is better

To live as a loving Christian,
than to selfishly do whatever it is that we want to do.

In Chapter 9, Paul offered examples of what

a sacrificial life might look like.

He mentioned sacrifices that he made, like

Not getting married, so he could preach full-time,^{vii} *And*
waiving the right to get paid for his work as a craftsman.^{viii}

“I have become all things to all people”, Paul said.

Paul was talking about putting himself last,
And putting his work as an Evangelist, 1st.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said,

“Let's go... so that I may proclaim the message ...

That is what I came... to do.”

Both Jesus and Paul spoke of their vocations,

as God's messengers.

In that work God called both of them

to lay down their earthly life.

If we are paying attention to the Bible readings each Sunday,

And if we are honest with ourselves ^{ix-} y reading ...

By now we should be feeling a little bit uncomfortable.

We live in a media saturated culture that

both creates and encourages the habits

of endless consumption.

We need to say “No”,

But after a lifetime of brainwashing,

our first tendency is to put ourselves first,

while the rest of the world, can wait,

way down ... at the end the line.

But that isn't Jesus' way, and it cannot be ours,
if want to claim him as Lord.

Paul of Tarsus put his Kingdom work first, and himself last.
Very tough. It's hard to imagine living his life.

In this moment ... the late industrial 21st century ...
Self-sacrifice is just not how we Americans, roll.

And, you know what? I totally get it.
We were all raised like that. It's our culture.

Every one of us is relentlessly targeted
as an individual consumer.

It's all about Me Me Me and I I I
Because individuals consume most of the
shiny new products in our marketplace.^x

But I don't condemn capitalism. I like having nice stuff.

- I am glad that I am not hungry anymore.
- I am glad that I don't have to fix my beater car each weekend, just to get it through the week.

Jesus set himself aside, to serve his Father's Kingdom.

Paul gave his life,

to lay a foundation for modern Christianity.

And so... I ask myself ... and I ask each of you

whether the commercial messages we hear,

And the choices we make in response ...

Reflect a commitment to follow Christ? ^{xi}

Paul's life revealed to everyone that he

had decided to follow Jesus.

What choices do our lives reveal?

Do our choices say, to a stranger,

"I have decided to follow Jesus?"

I'm not talking about our flags or bumper stickers

or Facebook feeds or Tweets.

I'm talking about real life choices.

Mine and Yours.

Does anything we do, reveal our decision to follow Jesus?

In High School I often heard a song – *and you’ll know the tune*—
that “they’ll know Christians by our love”.^{xii}

I mean... *Will they?*

Will they know I’m a Christian?

Will they even have a clue?

Will they know we are Christians by our love”?

I spent 30 years practicing law in courtrooms.

That’s a lot of billable hours.

I looked like a lawyer, talked like a lawyer

and thought like a lawyer.

I’m in recovery now.

But I have to ask myself,

“If I was on trial for being a Christian,

Would there be enough evidence to convict me?”

If, *in my defense*, I testified that: “I tithed every year”.

Would the Prosecutor remind the jury,

that I took a tax write off, too?

Did I ever give so much that I felt uncomfortable?

What if I testified that: “I regularly volunteered”?

Would the prosecutor remind the jury that I only
volunteered to do the work that I liked to do?

Would she remind the jury that I tended to volunteer
only when it was convenient?

Jesus volunteered. Very inconvenient.

He went to the cross. Not for His sake, but for ours.

Paul was a successful scholar and prosecutor.

But he volunteered to serve the Lord.

And as an old man, fell to a Roman blade.

Not for his sake, but *for the sake of the Kingdom and for us.*

Jesus was convicted.

Paul was convicted.

Would I be convicted too?

-AMEN

ⁱ The Roman's sacked Corinth in 146 BC, but within a Century it was the administrative capital of the Roman province of Achaia.



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https://www.google.com/search?q=corinth+greece+photos&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS850US850&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=JBiKZ1DSSWe2yM%252CBNJp0Nhd9U5BEM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kQIt6oq4_-eo0EGlpMB-4lQcbB0cw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjuxKiRhczuAhUFnKwKHStuBH8Q9QF6BAgKEAE&biw=1034&bih=752

ⁱⁱⁱ Time estimates from that era are educated surmises based on ancient writings, from an era in which calendars were in development and clocks did not exist. Then time was considered more of days and of seasons than of minutes or hours or seconds, as we do today.

^{iv} The 1st letter, which is mentioned in the 2nd letter, is lost.

^v through letters that we don't have.

^{vi} Which we didn't read....

^{vii} 9:5ff

^{viii} 9:6ff . Please don't get any ideas. Neither St. Paul nor I have a Trust Fund.

^{ix} And by "we", I mean "You" and "Me".

^x Which were once built here but much of which are now built 3,000 miles away.

^{xi} Or even follow Paul!

^{xii} "They'll Know We Are Christians", inspired by John 13:35, is a Christian hymn written in the 1960s by a Catholic priest, the late Fr. Peter Scholtes. It was released on an LP of the same name featuring the congregation of Fr. Scholtes' church, St. Brendan's on the South Side of Chicago. See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/They%27ll_Know_We_Are_Christians