January 16

Grace and peace to you this day.

As we continue our walk through the books of the Bible in order, this week we will look briefly at the apostle Paul’s first letter to the church at a city called Corinth. The book is known as 1 Corinthians.

Like many of the places Paul visited, Corinth was a bustling city of commerce and culture. It was a port city that brought sailors, merchants, and all the things that sailors and merchants bring to a coastal town. It was filled with idolatry and immorality, and the church there struggled in this environment. Paul wrote this letter in about 55 AD as a letter of instruction and encouragement.

This letter actually contains one of my all time favorite of passages of Scripture, one that, at least for me, speaks to the abundant and mysterious nature of the Almighty:

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (2:9).

Here Paul is quoting the prophet Isaiah and is discussing “God’s secret wisdom” that He “destined for our glory before time began” (v. 7). Paul is saying that God’s wisdom is eternal, that its purpose is our “glory,” meaning our salvation, and that it is so abounding in love and grace that no human mind can begin to understand it.

As the author Kurt Vonnegut would say, “and so it goes.” As I now have completed my 65th trip around that star we call the Sun, I increasingly stand in awe and wonder at the ways of our Creator. Lavish love. Magnificent mercy. Abiding grace. So much so that the human mind simply can’t conceive it, and human sense can’t perceive it. And yet, there it is, waiting to embrace those who love him.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
January 17

Greetings DGCC family.

When I was a music student at Illinois Wesleyan University, I studied advanced conducting with the university’s orchestra director, Mr. Robert Luke. Mr. Luke was previously a cellist with the Royal London Philharmonic Orchestra. In other words, he was a "real deal" classical musician.

One of the things he taught me was that I should never pretend that I am the best musician in the room. I was not the best flute player, violinist, or even triangle ringer. My job was to honor everyone’s musical gifts and talents and work together with them to create something beautiful.

The apostle Paul teaches a similar lesson in his first letter to the church at Corinth:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (12:4-6).

One of the many reasons why I so love serving the Lord at DGCC is the wonderful spirit of service and generosity that permeates our spiritual DNA. Meal ministry, care for the lonely and aged, instructing our children, and simply being with each other through the passages of life. Truly being the hands and feet of Jesus in our community. Everyone using their respective gifts “distributed” to them by the Holy Spirit to create something beautiful: the light of Christ that shines from our corner of the world at 66th and Fairview.

My prayer for all of us in 2023 is to continue to use those gifts, to continue to create something beautiful in the Lord’s name, and to continue to allow the light of Christ to shine brightly.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
Greetings to you in the name of Jesus.

One cannot escape the notion that the Christian life, and the Christian faith, is full of paradox and things that swim against the current of worldly thought. Jesus Himself spoke of many of these things that to a secular world, then and now, seem almost tone deaf:

“Love thy neighbor.”

“Turn the other cheek.”

“Blessed are the poor, the meek, and the merciful.”

You get the idea. This seeming paradox reaches its glory in the resurrection itself: from death comes eternal life for those who put their faith in Jesus.

The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the church at Corinth, writes a great exposition on what love is. Remember that Paul, formerly known as Saul, was once a Pharisee consumed by hatred for Jesus and His followers. His loathing of them knew no bounds. And yet, Jesus takes this man, His sworn enemy, and transforms his heart, his mind, and his soul. This man who once loved nothing more than to throw the followers of Jesus in jail, or worse, now writes what might be the most beautiful and inspiring passage on the true nature of love. This is what he says:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (13:4-8).

In the Christian life, the poor become rich.

The powerless inherit the kingdom.

The hungry are filled.

Death becomes life.

Love perseveres.

And love never fails.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
January 19

Greetings, DGCC Family.

As we finish our very brief look at the book of 1 Corinthians, I would like to share with you what I consider one of the most powerful verses in all of Scripture. For me, it captures the essence of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

“‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:54-57).

Here Paul is quoting both the prophets Isaiah (“Death has been swallowed up in victory”) and Hosea (Where O death od your sting…”). Paul, who was an expert in the Scriptures (which again, in his day, was what we know as the Old Testament, the New Testament did not yet exist) ties together these ancient prophecies with the salvation found in Jesus. In effect, Paul is saying that Jesus was the basis of these prophecies so many years ago.

Furthermore, Paul uses the strong language for which we have come to know him. Death is “swallowed up” (literally from the Greek, death is “gulped down”). Death has lost its “sting” (in the days of Paul, those who travelled desert roads had to be very careful of scorpions and other stinging creatures that could cause death. It is that “sting” to which Paul refers.) And finally, we have the “victory” over death through the eternal life found in faith in “our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is important here to understand that the victory to which Paul refers is some simply a truce or a temporary triumph in a battle to be fought again. Far from it. The word Paul uses here, and correctly so, is *nikos*, it means that something is “utterly vanquished.” Completely destroyed. Totally defeated.

Jesus overcomes sin. Jesus vanquishes, destroys, defeats death itself. And out of that, the Resurrection brings glorious and eternal life in the mighty arms of our gentle and loving Savior, who even now is waiting for that day when He welcomes us home.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
January 20

Happy Friday, everyone! Here’s your musical devotion for the week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhNxXBTljfk

IHS,

Pastor Lou