

Well, today we hear Paul laying into the people of Corinth. Paul left a Christian community that he founded in pretty good shape. They were all organized in house churches. He had taught them about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And I imagine he was proud of the fact that this congregation came from many different walks of life. Freed slaves were worshiping with tradespeople and with wealthy shippers and landowners. Paul could leave them (in about the year 51) feeling pretty secure that these people had really gotten the Good News, and were really ready to lead be a church – a faithful community of Christians.

This letter to that congregation is thought to have been written in about 53. It sure didn't take long for things to kind of fall apart among the Christians in Corinth. The people who had been so faithful had now descended into quarrelling and disputing with each other. Maybe it was because they worshipped in house churches. Each house may have had its own leader and each gathering may have become quite dependent on, and enamored of their own leader, probably one was Apollos, one may have been Cephus, and one, perhaps, may have been Chloe, a woman!! But Paul's language is clear. "I hear there are quarrels among you."

We humans have a tendency to see things in a binary fashion. I'm Right. You're wrong. You're on my side, or your on his side. Criminals or law abiders. My people or Chloe's people. It goes on and on and on. We sure know in our hearts that all these subjects are not so black and white.

Well, there are two kinds of people in the world, of course. There are those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who don't.

But we can't get away from the plain fact that Paul is angry in this part of his letter. "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius...well, and the household of Stephanas, come to think of it."

It's not that baptism isn't important, but Paul wants people to get beyond a local personality cult. They were there (and we are here) to focus on Christ and him crucified. Yes, we start with baptism to enter into the Christian faith. But then we're supposed to grow into maturity, and beyond pettiness.

Quarrelling about who's not doing their part around here; who's not living their program of recovery properly; or who hasn't got the right sort of political beliefs, is not where Paul wants his people or us to be.

We must not let the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

That is the power to see the good in all people. It is the power to forgive people who have hurt us. It is the power to not have to fight fire with fire. It is the power to LIVE in spite of anything that the world throws at us. Knowing that there are always people who support us and whom we support. We are to LIVE growing more and more into the Cross of Christ.

And so we go from quarrels and infighting and jockeying for position of the people in Corinth, to stepping back in time to when Jesus was preaching to his disciples on a mountain, a mountain to be compared with Moses going up the mountain to see God and receive the commandments, and so many Biblical passages where, when one wants to be close to God, up a mountain we go.

Sitting there with Jesus on a mountain, we have an entirely different view of life and the world below. We are above quarrels and differences. When you've climbed a mountain you are out of breath and a bit dazed by the view of the whole of the countryside spread out below.

And the very first thing he teaches them is what it is to be blessed. He told them in his teaching that he is a Messiah who blesses. I think he's saying both, "Let me tell you about the kind of people who are blessed in this life, and in this same way YOU are blessed in this life."

You might even not realize that you are blessed and a blessing to others. Here's how Jesus teaches them what are the gifts that he thinks are the most important for being a disciples.

Jesus gets very specific and very personal with his disciples; so let's imagine him doing that with us in our day and with our circumstances. It's that Jesus wishes to give each of us a blessing where we are, and as we reach out for the Kingdom of Heaven.

How fortunate is She who works hard at two jobs. She lives in a trailer in Amenia. And she remains willing to receive the help of the community and friends, and generously makes cookies for everyone.

How lucky are The brothers whose father is dying. They are sitting vigil by their dad's bed at a nursing home and God is blessing them with presence and time with their father, and a new bond they've never had before.

How happy is He, who lives by himself, who quietly putters in his garden, and just as quietly supports every good cause in the area.

How enviable is She, a refugee who lives with her family in Toledo. She prays for President Trump every day, and for a day when her family will be able to join her in the US.

How privileged is He. He is a parole officer in Hartford who has a stack of cases on his desk and does his best seeing each case as a real person who needs to be understood and respected.

How lucky is He. His music brings him such serenity as he plays his violin with others, and for others who seek pure joy and peace.

How fortunate is She, who sits on the town council, and with great difficulty, and after listening to lots of shouting, has managed to help hammer out a compromise between warring neighbors.

How happy are They, who has been taken as hostages by those who persecute Christians. They spends their days in a makeshift prison, recalling bits of Holy Scripture for each other, learn about each other's journeys, and as so support each other in whatever may be in store for them.

Each one of these people is blessed in their difficulties and in their discovery of the Spirit of God. The people of Corinth learned about the life of Christ from Paul. Paul would have told them the teachings of Jesus that he learned and that would soon be recorded by Matthew in Gospel form. Let us learn from the blessings that God gives us. Let us remind each other of the blessings that we see in each other, and not the simple condemnation that this one is right and that one is wrong in our eyes.

Jesus will bless us with comfort, mercy, and hope. Let's work to see the blessing, and be a blessing.