

Foundation Of Your Life

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[0 : 00] Father, some of us are Jews seeking signs and others of us are Greeks seeking wisdom and others are barbarians seeking nothing in particular.

Grant that we may hear the gospel of Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Amen. In the busyness of things, I have had only one or two chances to preach since the first of December, at least to the 10 o'clock service, and so today I'm taking the whole of the epistle to the Corinthians.

If you'll turn to it on page 156 in the Pew Bibles, you'll see in the bulletin as well for this Sunday that next week we're going to look at the second epistle to the Corinthians.

Dr. Packer is going to be preaching then. I need to sort of get our coordinates as to just where we are as a parish right now.

[1 : 19] We are gathered on this Lord's Day in obedience to Christ's command to partake of word and the sacrament of the Holy Communion.

We are citizens of a country trying to come to grips with our national inferiority complex, and in the process it looks like we could dismantle the country.

I trust that's not going to be true. The war is over this week. 150,000 to 200,000 people killed. A world we live in, which knows there must be an alternative to war, but we don't know what it is. Our church nationally is being marginalized, and that for reasons that perhaps we will understand if we look at 1 Corinthians.

Our parish is in a peculiar position like Jeremiah was in in Jeremiah chapter 32, where with the enemy at the gates of the city ready to move in and destroy them and take them away into captivity, Jeremiah went out and bought a piece of real estate.

[2 : 39] And he did it because he said, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. And with recession on us and unemployment and all sorts of gloom and doom gripping people's hearts, God seems to have called us to restore the church and to do all those things which have to do with the fact that we plan that yet again, in terms of God's vineyard, houses and fields and vineyards shall again flourish in the land, and the work of Christ will go on to generations that succeed ours.

God has prospered us as a parish in amazing ways. The potential of our partnership with St. Chad's is very exciting.

God sending Dr. Tim Murphy to be our parish administrator seems a great gift from God. We have elected a new church committee for this year of people who are prepared to take in hand the work and ministry of this parish and to try and share it among the whole congregation.

We have an evening service which is a wonder to behold. And if you haven't beheld it, you should come and behold it sometime. It will give you something of a more rounded picture of Anglicanism. Ha! We are certainly a parish to whom much has been given, and the corollary to that we need to take seriously to heart.

[4 : 22] It's really for that reason, to try and objectify who we are and what we are called to do in Christ's name in this city and in this community and in this congregation that I want you to look at another congregation and another city.

And that other city is Corinth. I wonder if they had a congregation comparable to this one. It was a port city. It was known for licentiousness, which is I'm sure a bad thing, but I'm not sure quite how. And you can look it up in your dictionary as well as I look it up in mine. It was noted for athletic competitions, as was the whole of the Greek peninsula.

They knew all about farming and agriculture. It was a city that had many different kinds of population in it, and so one of the great businesses in that city, as in ours, is anonymous sexuality,

the kind of sexuality that can't happen in a small town but flourishes in a big city where everybody can remain anonymous.

It was a very religious city and a very immoral city, those two things going together for some strange reason, not unknown to contemporary history.

[5 : 50] And that was the city which a nuclear bomb, so to speak, hit. In the story that Don Bennett read to us this morning, when Paul went there and for 18 months preached the gospel, he usually went into a town, preached the gospel, gained a following, hostility and jealousy was generated, and he was driven out of town and had to go to the next one and start again.

And he'd done that so many times that when he came to Corinth, he woke up at night saying, I wonder when it's going to happen here. And the Lord said, don't worry, you've got many friends in this city, you can stay.

And Paul stayed and ignited the gospel bomb, which was a clean bomb with redemptive fallout. Our world may consider the Christian gospel to be contaminating, but it was a contamination of eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

And for 18 months, Paul stayed in Corinth and he said, Jesus is the Christ. Explained that to the Greeks, explained it to the Romans, explained it to the Jews, and explained it to the barbarians. And that was the 2,000 years later. The great and ancient city of Corinth is known mainly because it maintained a correspondence with St. Paul, which you have in front of you right now.

[7 : 21] In this letter, Paul said amazing things which were foundational to the whole of the Christian faith. And I want just to rehearse some of those things for you to remind you, all this comes from this letter to the Corinthians.

Paul went there and made the classical statement which is part of the gospel for today. I am resolved to know among you nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

A commitment to agnosticism. We think we know everything about everything and nothing about Jesus Christ. Paul said, I am resolved to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul said to the people in this correspondence, there is a hidden secret wisdom of God. I know you as a city are famous for your wisdom in trade and in commerce and in understanding, but there is a hidden wisdom you know nothing about which is revealed in Christ Jesus.

He said again, he talked about the fact that Jews demand a miraculous sign and that's why some of us are Jews looking for a miraculous sign.

[8 : 42] Greeks are seeking wisdom, something to satisfy the deep demands of our intellect. And others were seeking other things, but Paul said that what he was prepared to do was to preach Christ crucified, the wisdom of God and the power of God.

Because Paul said to the Corinthians, the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men and the weakness of God is stronger than the strongest of men.

So the foolishness of God was publicly placarded in front of them in the person of Christ crucified. And the power of God was demonstrated in raising him from the dead.

If that's what you're looking for, that's what God has provided. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he made some statements about though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.

He said, the great gift of communication without love don't communicate anything. He said, the great gift of achievement spiritually accomplishes nothing.

[10 : 09] Even religious martyrdom leaves you nowhere apart from the new reality which breaks into our world through the person of Jesus Christ crucified and that is love.

He made a radical statement which you'll have to find for yourself. It is good for a man not to marry. And then he explained it.

He said, though I am free, he said, I make myself a slave in order to win people to the faith of Christ.

He said, of his body I beat my body to make it my slave lest having preached to others I myself should be a castaway.

He looked at the Corinthian church and their celebration of the Holy Communion and he said with solemn brevity he who eats this bread and drinks this cup unworthily.

[11 : 21] He warned us that that could happen. He said of the driving sexual arousal that happened to people he spoke of the fact that it's better to marry than to burn.

He said if in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all people most miserable because even this first generation church was slipping away from the central reality of the whole of Christian worship the whole of Christianity history that on the third day Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of God the Father and he said if we don't believe that the rest of it is a waste of time it doesn't make any sense and churches so easily slip away from that and wonder why they don't make any sense he spoke in it to a well we I think in the western world we think of ourselves as having moral rectitude so we accuse we point the accusing finger at our politicians and those in our society who fail to exhibit this moral rectitude but we don't have any spiritual faith the church in Corinth was booming with spiritual faith and a new understanding of the gospel but their morality hadn't been brought into line yet but you see moral rectitude will never produce faith but faith will produce moral rectitude a moral uprightness before a holy God and we've got it backward and Paul demonstrates in the church in Corinth how this is happening he said that the gospel

I mean what you read in the letter was that in this city in so many ways like Vancouver the gospel gained a foothold and Paul was encouraging that congregation to hold on to the beachhead they had established and not to retreat in the face of the impact of the secular philosophy the religious birth all the things that tended to denigrate the gospel of Jesus Christ Paul said hold on and he told them how to hold on if you go through the letter to the to the Corinthians you find that that they had problems in this very dynamic and pervasive culture of Corinth which had wealth religion drama athletics sexual exploitation and rampant idolatry all this was happening and it had a tremendous influence on the small

Christian community it was not unlike the gospel this morning where the oracles of God had been given to the people of God the people of God centered their worship in the temple in Jerusalem and Jesus comes into the Jerusalem temple and has to drive out the money changers so Paul by his letter comes into this congregation in Corinth and has to drive out to confront and to drive back the all the forces that are moving in to neutralize the impact of the gospel in the lives of that believing community and so it is our prayer that we as a congregation will be such as can hear the word of God as it comes among us to drive out the money changers to get us reestablished on those things which are at the heart at the heart of our faith we need that desperately and we need there's a continual need for it in our midst and may God not spare us that so that was what was happening people in

Corinth were going to law with one another even though they knew that they had another judge and another law whom it was more important they should face family breakdown was taking place marriages were breaking down gross immorality in terms of a father of a son taking his father's wife there was divisiveness and quarreling as was read in the first 17 verses of chapter one they were there was spiritual retardation and immaturity among the Christians in Corinth there were single people that were desperate to be married and married people that were desperate to be single there was experiments with sexual asceticism I don't know if there's comparisons to that but people living together without any sexual encounter in obedience to Christ and finding it very difficult indeed there was wild enthusiasm with spiritual gifts in people who had no spiritual maturity and Paul devotes chapter 14 to trying to sort that one out and so

[17:09] Saint Paul writes his letter to these people and says there is a wisdom of God that comes from Christ and him crucified and you need that wisdom it doesn't belong to the world around you if it did Paul says they would not have crucified the Lord of glory he said there is the body of Christ to which you belong and that is the most important place of belonging in the whole of your earthly life Paul said to them lifetime marriage fidelity is possible he said morality is a product of your faith not a prerequisite as lots of people imagine he says Christianity without hope is a a cruel delusion and holy communion is capable of contamination but what he's saying in all this is that the very point where you want to give up is the point where you exchange the wood hay and stubble of your immature faith for the gold and silver and precious stone and we are tempted to give up in our world when we face terminal illness in ourselves or in someone we know and love we are tempted to give up at the moment of bereavement we're tempted to give up because we are on we're looking for an intellectual adventure and we want to know rather than to be known we're tempted to give up when we are guilty of a serious breach of the ten commandments and most of us when we come to that tend to dismiss the whole of the

Christian faith because of our own personal moral failure and our unwillingness to face that failure and its consequences we are we are tempted to give up on our faith when a marriage is contracted

because we say this is all I really want we're also tempted to give up our faith when a marriage is dissolved because we're so deeply disillusioned we're tempted to give up when we stand under condemnation by the law or by our society where we are centered out and the finger is pointed at us and we are the guilty one and we're tempted to give up in that point when in fact coming under condemnation is the natural air we should breathe knowing the sinfulness of our own hearts we're tempted to give when we are overcome by the illusion which comes over us at the pinnacle of human achievement and we think that all the answers are in myself and so I give up we are tempted to give up when we are able to preach or to talk or to be a spellbinder among other people and then we find the total emptiness of it we may become heroic martyrs for the cause and discover that that is not enough facing death we are tempted to give up when we are confronted with war death disease famine and violence we give in to despair and say this

Christianity thing has not worked Paul says it's at exactly those points where you can find a glimpse of the reality of the gospel it's exactly at that point that you can find the nature of the foundation on which your life is based and if you look at 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 10 that's what Paul is saying he says this is what's happening and may by God's grace this be what is happening to us here as we read this story Paul writes 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 10 according according to the grace of God given to me Paul writes like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation another man is building on it let each take care how he builds upon it for no other no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid which is

Jesus Christ no other foundation if anyone builds on the foundation with gold silver and precious stones wood hay or straw each man's work will be manifest for the day of judgment will disclose it better it will be revealed with fire and fire will test what sort of work one has done if the work any man has built on that foundation survives he will receive a reward if any man is burned up he will suffer loss but though he himself will be saved but only as through fire this wonderful foundation for our faith has been established for our faith as a congregation we waste much of our time building with wood hay and stubble on that good foundation and Paul is concerned that we build on it with gold and silver and precious stones and my prayer for us as a congregation at this particular time is having this foundation which is

Christ Jesus we may build well on it that we may not waste our time and energy with wood hay and stubble let me pray our God as we think of the wonder of this first epistle to the Corinthians and we think how deeply we need to be reassured how much we need to know the foundations on which our faith is based how central to our faith is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ how essential is that hidden wisdom our God grant to us by your Holy Spirit renewal in our personal lives renewal in our life together father as we come in faith to partake of this Holy Communion may the prayer on all our hearts be for renewal in the faith of

[24 : 34] Jesus Christ we ask in his name amen to God Christ as Christ as consecmn to such