

EPIPHANY 5 YEAR B
ISAIAH 40:21-31
1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-23
MARK 1:29-39
FEBRUARY 3, 4, 2018

We all know people that will say and do anything to get you to agree with them. We know people that will do whatever it takes to get you to follow them, buy their product or side with them. Most of us would rather not associate with people such as this. We would rather steer clear of someone that is in a relationship with us simply to take advantage of us or to get something from us.

Paul would seem to be such a person as this. In our reading from 1 Corinthians 9 Paul says he tries to be all things to all people. To the Jews he is a Jew. To the Gentiles he is a Gentile. He does this so that he might gain some for the kingdom of God. Is Paul someone we should stay away from or stop listening to? Is he someone he should be suspicious of?

In the verses preceding our reading today from 1 Corinthians 9 Paul was responding to questions about various issues in the church including his authority to preach and teach. There were questions about eating and drinking certain foods. Paul was a Jew but God sent him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul says that his authority for preaching and teaching comes from God. There were many factions or groups in the church of Jesus Christ just as there are now. In the church there were Jewish Christians who taught that anyone becoming a Christian must also observe the Jewish laws, rituals and teachings. If Gentiles would become part of the church they would need to abstain from certain foods and abide by the other customs of the Jews. Paul taught that since we are saved by grace and through faith the Gentiles were free from the old customs of the Jews. Which faction or group has it right?

1 Corinthians 9:16, 17 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! ¹⁷For 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.

Paul proclaims the gospel out of a sense of obligation but claims no right to boast about his preaching. Paul must proclaim the message of the gospel because of the grace of God through Jesus. When Paul says “Woe is me if I do not proclaim the gospel,” he might be telling the Corinthians about his relationship with the Lord Jesus. His relationship with God is such that he seeks to lead others to also be in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Paul must preach to all people and share the same message of salvation no matter whom he is talking to. When Paul is teaching the Jews he must come to them as a Jew. When he was preaching to Gentiles he must come to them as a Gentile. The message is not different. There is only one gospel of Jesus Christ but it makes a difference whom your audience is. Paul has the obligation to proclaim the gospel no matter where he is. The task was placed on him whether with the other apostles, with those that were new to the faith or with those mature in faith. Paul says he is not doing this of his own will but because God entrusted him with this task.

As I was thinking about these verses I thought about my own motives for preaching and teaching. I also wondered why anyone would listen to my sermons or come to my Bible Study groups. Why would anyone listen to Paul? I have been preaching sermons for almost 31 years if you count my seminary and internship days. What motivates me to continue preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do I do this of my own free will or is there something else working here? I know I get a paycheck for being your pastor but can someone actually get paid for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ? It might be argued that if I didn't preach every week I would also not continue to be your pastor. If I did not continue to receive a paycheck I may likewise not be here. Paul also says that the worker deserves to be paid. I enjoy being here and

I like being your pastor but the gospel of Jesus Christ does not come with a price tag. While serving the Lord has its reward, we proclaim the gospel because of what the Lord has already done for us on the cross. We do the ministry we are called to apart from the rewards we might look forward to.

1 Corinthians 9:22, 23 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. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

How do we listen to Paul as he tells about proclaiming the gospel so that many would come to believe in Jesus Christ? We might help ourselves and our neighbors if we were to reflect on how well or poorly we embrace Paul's words and Paul's ministry. We are here and we are part of the community of faith entrusted with sharing the message of salvation. As we read and reflect on these words of Paul we might remember that Paul was not necessarily all things to all people. There are many that really did not like Paul and there was nothing he could do that would change that. Paul was run out of town, beaten by mobs, thrown in jail by people with whom he did not exactly fully connect. You and I will not be all things to everyone either. Paul is the writer of a fourth of the New Testament. These words came from the hand of someone who lived out his mission. The word of God was important to Paul. It was most important for him to share this word. Paul treated everyone as if they mattered to him and to God. Paul sought to embody a still more excellent way.

The truth is that you and I are "all things to all people" in more ways that we know. We share the same gospel of Jesus Christ no matter where we go or who we are with. I sometimes spend time at St. Luke's and with hospice. The people I minister to might be different than the people I minister to at Our Savior's. Some have no official church affiliation. I sometimes care for some that are not Lutheran. Each needs to receive the blessings of the Lord. They need to know that God is with them and they are important to God and God's people. It is the same gospel but related in different ways. The same is true for you. Some of the

people you hang out with are not Lutheran or do not go to church yet you share the message of the Lord with them. You may not stand on a soapbox but you share the gospel in what you say and what you do. Our intent is that others will come to know that Jesus is the Christ and that he is Lord.

We share this message with a sense of urgency but also in our obligations as people of God saved by grace. The message and the Christian obligation is the same whether we receive a paycheck or not. We serve the Lord and we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in all that we say and do. We give God the glory and we praise God for receiving us as sons and daughters. AMEN