

Sermon for October 4th, 2026
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS
Deuteronomy 10:12-21

12 “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **13** and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? **14** Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. **15** Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. **16** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. **17** For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. **18** He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. **19** Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. **20** You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. **21** He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. **22** Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Psalms 34:8-22

8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
9 Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
12 What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
13 Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.
19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.

21 Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Matthew 22:41-46

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” 43 He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

44 “‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet’”?

45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” 46 And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Our text for meditation this Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The Corinthian church, to whom St. Paul is writing, was a complete and total mess. Right after this positive greeting, in the very same chapter, the Apostle complains about the factionalism that was arising in the congregation, with one man saying “I follow Paul,” another saying “I follow Apollos,” and another saying “I follow Cephas.”¹ In other words, they were fighting over their favorite “influencers” in the Church and dividing the church over it. But their situation is worse than mere factionalism, for while they were arguing over which Christian teacher is the best they were tolerating crass incestuous sexual sin.² They were also suing one another over frivolous matters, eating foods sacrificed to idols as a show of piety, getting drunk at Communion, having chaotic Sunday services

1 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, through to the fourth chapter.

2 1 Corinthians 5

with people speaking randomly in tongues, and some of their members also denied the Resurrection of the dead.³ Needless to say, the Apostle rightly spends most of his Epistle being upset with them.

So then, knowing how the *rest* of the Epistle goes, this introductory praise in our reading becomes quite jarring. If St. Paul intended to spend most of his writing condemning their sins, squabbles and scheming, then how on earth could he thank God for anything good here? Not only that, but why would he *always* thank God for them? They're an insult to Christianity, not something praiseworthy!

The Continuing Work of Christ

The reason for his gratitude is simple: Christ saved them. St. Paul looks to our Lord's merit more than their dysfunction, and all he sees in that regard is improvement. Initially these people were all pagans, living in sin without a care as to the wickedness of their lifestyles; they bowed down to false gods, fornicated, stole, fought, killed, engaged in homosexuality and drunkenness, etc.⁴ Then they heard and believed in the Gospel, and everything changed. The sense of the text here is that as soon as the Corinthians began bearing testimony of their faith in Jesus, our Lord increased them in “all speech and all knowledge.” By beginning with a comment on just how far they have come from their prior unbelief, St. Paul lets us know that his subsequent chastisements are *not* coming from a place of malice. The Corinthians are messed up; they are a lot *less* messed up than they used to be.

Not only did Christ save them, He continued to work in their hearts. St. Paul addresses the Corinthians as a people who are not only saved, but being sustained by our Savior in the faith by the continued forgiveness of their sins. He speaks confidently to them, saying that when Jesus returns they shall be guiltless. Think of it, a church with so many problems and sins being counted as guiltless! But so it is, for Jesus is always forgiving those who approach Him in penitence. His mercies are new every morning,⁵ He brings forgiveness in His Name by the words of absolution and He brings even more at the Sacrament of the Altar! Though the Apostle is about to dig deep into the dysfunction of the Corinthians, he prefaces the entire letter with gratitude and an unshakeable belief that they will be preserved intact by our Lord until His Return.

Seeing the Improvement First

My friends, do you ever look back and think of yourself this way? So many Christians look at their pasts full of sin and all they can do is feel shame and remorse. But you should instead be praising our Lord for saving you and taking that guilt away. So many believers think about their deficiencies *now*, but if they considered where they are now as believers compared to *before* they were saved, then joy would surely replace their shame. Do not think of yourself as a horrible wretched worm of a sinner: God put that old sinner in the past and replaced it with a Saint at your baptism. Do not look upon your current problems to tell you who you are: look at what Christ does for you in sustaining your faith, and entrust Him to make you better.

We must see ourselves this way to fully understand the power of the Gospel. Christ dying and rising for us sinners means that we can no longer see ourselves as though we were damned. Problems with sin in our lives, like the Corinthian church, must upset us not because it means we are in perdition, but because we earnestly want to be conformed to the way *God* sees us. He calls you a saint, and justifies you before Him; now is the time to *live* like it, and to go to our Lord for help getting there.

Just as importantly my friends, do you see your fellow Christians this way? When you see the believer who is struggling with sin, do you write him off as a bad person, or do you see him as a dear

3 1 Corinthians 6-15

4 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

5 Lamentations 3:22-23

brother who needs some help? Do you pour scorn upon his head the way a Pharisee would, or do you thank God that he is better than he was before he became a Christian? In this very Epistle, St. Paul tells us to imitate him as he imitates Christ,⁶ so we are bound to extend the same kindness to other believers that he extends to the Corinthians. This means that when another Christian – or even a congregation – is messed up, we do not look to their failures first, but instead we start with the faithfulness of our Lord. We rest confident that God will help them before we have anything to do with correcting their errors.

This of course takes much patience. You and I might encounter a brother or sister in Christ who has lapsed into their old drug habit or struggled more recently with pornography, or any other sin that may arise. We might be frustrated with their shortcoming, expecting better of them; after all, the same way *we* want to be conformed to the way God sees us, we rightly expect other believers to do likewise. But at the same time my friends, we are sinners too. We must correct our erring brothers gently, for we would wish them to do the same if we fell into sin.⁷

Conclusion

It may strike us as odd that St. Paul speaks so positively to a congregation with so many problems, but that is precisely his point. If we look to our own merit or righteousness to be the measure of our Christianity, then all we shall see is loss and despair. But if we look to the works of Christ, who died for us and rose again for us and grants us His Body and His Blood, then all we shall see is salvation and improvement. And if we can look to Him with such confidence for caring for our *own* lives, then we most certainly can do so when seeing the lives of other believers. May we treat them accordingly, even when we have to speak frankly as to their shortcomings.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:1

⁷ Galatians 6:1