

"God is the One who gives the growth."

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Our meditation for this morning is from the Epistle lesson of today: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, which was read before - Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

A pastor once wrote: There are some "churches which indeed have no more mission vigor because they have, at least in our continent, no more doctrine." This pastor was making an interesting connection between doctrine and a burning desire to actually tell others about Jesus so that they might be saved. I would have to say that my time here as your pastor has been spent delivering doctrine, be it in sermons, Bible Classes, devotionals, in the administration of the pastoral office, and even in visits and conversations. I think they have been steeped in the clear teachings of the Bible that lay the foundation for the clear teachings of the Church.

What else did you expect me to do but tell you the truth truthfully? I have been called to proclaim the truthful teaching of the Holy Scripture. And yet, interestingly enough, I have heard at other places that people do not care if you are a great theologian or a great preacher just so long as they know that you love them. I always wonder what the message behind a statement like that is, and what the desired outcome of making that statement is. I have also heard from people that pastors should teach "simple things" suggesting that all of the weightier areas of doctrine were not important. They would say, "Doctrine just makes peoples' eyes glaze over! All they are really interested in, is knowing that Jesus loves them."

I have to tell you that I really do not believe that for one minute. And, after having been here for 6 years presenting doctrine to you at every opportunity that I can find, I do not think that you believe that either. I do not believe that Christians do not want to learn as much as they can about their faith. They might be a little afraid, a little intimidated, a little lazy, or even a little over confident as if there was nothing left to learn. But, I believe that you do want to learn. You do want to see how all the dots connect. You do want a faith that you can be certain about because you understand it, at least as much as human beings can understand the mysteries of God.

When a person is suffering from some serious medical condition, it is natural to learn as much as possible about the condition. They might meet with doctors, ask questions, read literature, and surf the internet. Soon all technical terms related to their condition quickly and easily fall from their tongues. They are willing to talk and share news of both their condition and the treatment with those who are interested.

It would seem strange then for us who have come to realize the deadly condition of sin in our lives not to be as equally interested to learn all we can. Not only about our condition under the Law, but also about the cure that comes through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is why I find it frustrating and difficult to believe that Christians do not really want to learn as much as they can about the Christian faith. It ought to be our nature as Christians to hunger and thirst after God's Word, to learn about it more and more, and to know it better and better and then to teach what we have learned to those around us.

When I look at things I have to admit that there have been many times when I have wondered if perhaps I might have been wrong. Maybe, just maybe, most Christians do not actually desire to learn as much as they can about their faith.

So the question that sits before you today is, What price are we going to have to pay one day for neglecting our Christian education? What will we one day have to suffer as a congregation and a Church for not being careful and diligent in our own studies, and in our own ongoing instruction in the faith?

Matthew 7 tells us that without a firm foundation in God's Word, the house of faith will fall. Children who do not know the Word very well, and who have not been taught it frequently by their parents and others who have authority over them, will one day become adults who do not know the Word very well. And as they grow older, being confronted on every side with all kinds of strange messages, they will not know what to believe. The reality is that they will not be able to distinguish between good, faithful preaching and falsehood. They will not be able to guard themselves against the dangers of the false teachers who will glorify themselves by secretly introducing destructive heresies, even denying the divinity of the Lord who bought them.

Another result of not being well-trained in the Christian faith is that eventually people will stop being concerned about sin, unbelief, repentance and

forgiveness. And if this goes on long enough, and becomes widespread enough, soon the Church will simply become irrelevant in people's lives. There will be no hearing of God's Word, no preaching of God's Word, and no teaching of God's Word for no one will care except God.

It will be a Church which no longer has any mission vigor because there is nothing to have any mission vigor about. There will be no love for God and certainly no love for the unsaved. No money will go to further the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world. And all of this will have happened because, as Jesus spoke about in John's Revelation, "The Church will have forsaken Her first love", that is, the Word of God and the salvation it brings to sinners.

In the Epistle of today St. Paul's speaks about these very issues. It speaks about Christians who are immature in the faith. It speaks about the role of Pastors in the congregation. It speaks about how Christians do not understand the faith nor do they understand the role and responsibilities of pastors, and how the proof of that is that they are divided up into all kinds of factions, fighting with one another in defiance of God's desire for unity of love and faith. Why would the non-believer want any part of that?

This is the third week in a row that we have heard St. Paul talk about mature and immature Christians, so what does this mean? First off, whether one is mature or immature, they are still a Christian. The same as people in a physical sense are mature or immature but they are still people, human beings, alive, and living, doing what people do. So what does it mean to be mature in the Christian faith?

Here it is; the Christian is called to live in repentance, confessing his sin and seeking, by the power of the Spirit, to grow into the fullness of the new life in Christ that will be completed only in the resurrection. An important part of Christian maturity is coming to the sober recognition that on this side of eternity we will always remain both saint and sinner (Rom 7:14-25). In fact, a sign of real maturity, in contrast to the supreme self-confidence of the Corinthians, is the capacity to confess with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15).

The smaller our sense of sin, the less we are driven to surrender to Christ. Christian growth then is, in contrast to all other growth, a growth downward in ever increasing recognition of our own sin, our own guilt, our own death, our own

condemnation.' At the same time, Christian maturation is also an upward growth in ever increasing appreciation for the full and complete forgiveness of sins won by Christ on the cross, and increasingly joyful hope in the life of the world to come.

That is what real maturity is, and because the Corinthians were not ready for it Paul fed them milk rather than spiritual solid food. Exactly what was on the menu for the more mature we do not know, but it may have been teachings about the person and work of Christ, the nature of the Trinity, the Sacraments, or the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. Paul presented such solid food to the Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians. But, the Corinthians were not yet ready. Paul will shame his hearers for their lack of maturity, but only in order to encourage them to strive for greater maturity, as he does in other letters to other congregations (Eph 4:13-14).

So, now that we understand, at least as much as we can understand, about Christian maturity we can move on to the issue of pastors and their relationship to the maturity of the congregation.

Friends, Pastors are God's fellow workers to plant and cultivate the seed of the Word. It is God, however, who make it grow. 6 years ago I came as your pastor and 5 years ago Pastor Scholz came as well as your Pastor. And before we came you had Pastor Bode who together with other members planted this congregation. After 5 years there are still members who still remember Pastor Bode, and that's fine. They say "pastor Bode did these things in this way". Yes, he did certain things in one way and we do thing in our way, and nothing wrong with that, but the three pastors have been faithful in Word and Sacrament.

We can say that Pastor Bode planted and we have watered Grace Lutheran Church, but God had made it grow. The glory belongs to God. We have been faithful preaching to you God's Word, teaching, and administering the Sacraments, taking every opportunity to deliver everything that we know about the Christian faith.

If a member of the congregation does not quite understand things and has more than a few strange ideas, that is not good but, it does not do great damage to the congregation because of the corrective influence of the pastor. To the pastor then a huge amount of responsibility is placed, and if the pastor goes goofy,

then he can do huge damage to the congregation for years to come. The pastor needs to know who he is and what his job is; Law and Gospel, preaching, teaching, and administering the Sacraments, counting on God to give the increase when and where God chooses.

Friends, the more you grow and mature, the more humble you will become, seeing yourself as the chief of sinners who has a blessed Savior in Christ Jesus. And then, by God's grace you will loose the will and desire to cause factions and disunity in the congregation, but will become far more generous with your tithes and offerings to advance the mission of the Church just as the mission came to you.

That is why we are gathered here today, to be fed. To feed on the Word and to feed on the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Supper He gave us to strengthen and preserve us in faith to life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, amen.