

Rev. Heather A. Riggs
Oak Grove UMC
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We Are The Church: Together

1 Cor 3:5-11

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

(Slide 1: We Are The Church Together)

The first person to really teach me about faith was my Kindergarten teacher, she planted the seed of my faith, by telling bible stories with a flannel graph.

Then there were many people who watered my faith.

My Lutheran grandmother who brought me to church with her.

Roman Catholic Priest who baptized me when I was 8 and asked me what story I would like him to preach on that Sunday.

The remedial catechism teacher who taught me what to do in confession and answered my endless questions.

The Assemblies of God youth group who directed my teenaged passion into discipleship.

The college Christian fellowship where I experienced small groups and learned about the spirituality of tithing...

The many people in the United Methodist Church who recognized my call to ministry, are mentoring me and gave me an opportunity to serve.

One planted, and another, and another, and another watered... and many of them didn't really agree! I mean, the Catholic Church of my baptism still won't recognize my call to ministry because of my gender!

"But God gave the growth." (3:6)

(slide 2: "...But God gave the growth." (I Cor. 3:6))

According to Acts chapter 18 Paul founded a Christian community in the Greek city of Corinth around 50 AD. Paul spent about 18 months in Corinth, planting the seed of faith, (Marcus Borg, *Evolution of the Word*, p57) and then Paul moved on to plant other communities, and continued to water the faith of many through his letters. Then other traveling disciples, like Apollos or Titus, or Silas, or John-Mark continued to water the faith of these new communities as they came through town.

And in the time of Paul there was no New Testament -- or rather, Paul and a few others were still in the process of writing the letters and gospels that became the New Testament. What the early Christians had was the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, and the memories of the disciples who had spent time with Jesus. So when these new Christian communities had questions they wrote a letter to Paul, or Peter, or James, or they asked the one of the traveling disciples, like Apollos, a question when they came through town.

And they didn't always agree.

In essentials they were mostly in agreement -- the story of the last supper, crucifixion and resurrection, and the things Jesus said - especially his radical simplification of all the law and the prophets down to, "love God and love your neighbor" (Lk 10:27) -- the big stuff like that, everybody pretty much agreed on. But how to apply what we agree on to our everyday lives -- that's a challenge that we continue to wrestle with today.

So the church in Corinth wrote Paul, their founder, a letter asking him: “you said this, Apollos said that... who are we supposed to believe?”

I love Paul’s response. Paul writes that Apollos and Paul are just servants with the common purpose of serving God. It doesn’t matter what Paul said, it doesn’t matter what Apollos said, what matters is what Jesus said, and we are all doing our best to teach you about Jesus.

Instead of treating Apollos as a rival or seeking to discredit Apollos, Paul accepts that they have different approaches to the same goal -- nurturing the faith in others.

Instead of feeling competitive or threatened by Apollos teaching in Corinth, Paul rejoices that others have been sent by God to water the seeds of faith that he planted.

Paul sees clearly that it’s not Paul’s church, it’s not Apollos’ church, it’s not my church, it’s not John Wesley’s or Martin Luther’s or the Pope’s church, it’s God’s church.

We all get to be a part of what God is doing. Sometimes we get to plant, other times we get to water, but God gives the growth.

We are all God’s servants, together, according to the grace God has given each of us. Together we continue to build the Church Universal on the foundation of Christ Jesus.

And we don’t always agree.

We still struggle with how to apply the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of Paul and the other apostles to our lives, and I think it’s OK that we still struggle and disagree.

Because God is bigger than any one understanding of God.

(slide 3: God is bigger than any one understanding of God)

And every day brings new challenges to figuring out how to live our faith, here and now.

When I look back at my time in the Catholic Church, or the Assemblies of God or the Lutherans, there are many things that I don't agree with now. But, what I remember the most, what I cling to, is what each of these different faith communities helped me to understand about God.

The Catholic church embraced me as a child, helped me to embrace the mystery of God.

The Assemblies of God taught me to pray without ceasing and to have passion in my faith.

The Lutherans taught me the unconditional depth and width of God's Grace, and a beautiful musical tradition.

And the United Methodist Church speaks to my soul's longing to labor together for a better world.

On this Reformation Sunday, many people are remembering the reasons why the, "one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" (Nicene Creed) split 500 years ago. And in the 500 years since then, the differences in theological method and understandings of authority that divided Protestants from Catholics have been joined by differences in our understanding of humanity, science and our relationship with the world.

And our differences in perspective aren't just between us and the good Christians in the church down the street. As I listen to you, I hear a many different theological perspectives just within our own faith community. I also hear many different ideas on how we should live out our faith together. And I see many different gifts and abilities and priorities and passions given to each of us according to the grace of God.

(slide 4: Our differences are a gift from God)

And I think that our differences are a gift from God.

That God intends our differences to work together
one planting, another watering but God giving the growth
One building in one way, another differently, and each of us choosing with
care how to best contribute to God's Holy Church, in our time and cultural
context.

Paul reminds me to look past our differences and focus on God.
To try to trust that somehow, even when I don't agree with my fellow
Christians, that we really are all God's servants working together.
We are *God's* Church, together.

Children's Message: Paul's shared Jesus with his friends.

Paul made tents for a living so we're going to make a simple tent while we talk about
Paul and his friends--

--- Fold your paper in half like this.

When Paul first came to Corinth, Paul met Aquilla & Priscilla, who were also
tentmakers, so Paul worked with them for a while.

--- Now fold the corners down to the middle

They talked and became friends while they worked together.

--- Now fold one of the points from the middle out, to make a door.

Jesus was so important to Paul, that Paul was always sharing his experiences of Jesus
with his friends.

--- Now stand it up like this!

Priscilla and Aquilla became friends with Jesus because of Paul. Priscilla and Aquilla
even helped found the new church in Ephesus because they were so excited about
Jesus.

--- Now hold your tents in your hands like this.

Let's pray: Holy God, help us, to share, with our friends, how important, you are, in our
lives. Amen.