



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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## Understanding the New Testament 1&2 Corinthians

*1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,  
2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,  
together with all those who in every place call on 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 has been given you in Christ Jesus,  
5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6 just as the  
testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you  
wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be  
blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of  
his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:1-9*

Thirteen letters in the New Testament are attributed to Paul. Scholars agree that seven of these are clearly the work of Paul and two of these are Paul's letters to the Corinthians. The other five undisputed letters are Romans, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians are the letters of a pastor to a troubled congregation. As I discussed in the introduction to the epistles, the earliest Christians did not have a rich tradition of leadership and experience to help them understand what it meant to be Christian. When disputes arose there were no precedents to help resolve the disputes. Paul's letters are meant to guide the members of the church back to lives of faithful Discipleship.

### 1 Corinthians

Paul's overriding message in First Corinthians is that our lives as Christians begin and end with Christ. Christ is everything. If you look at the opening to the letter cited above you will see that Paul uses the name of Christ nine times in the first nine verses of the letter. He is an apostle of Christ, the Church in Corinth is sanctified by Christ, they are joined together with all other Christians through Christ, Christ is the source of the grace that they have experienced, Christ is the source of their knowledge and strength and they are joined in Christ awaiting the return of Christ. Think of that mantra during the Clinton and Bush presidential campaign; "It's the economy, stupid!" Paul is telling the church at Corinth, "It's about Jesus Christ, stupid!" If you believe that Paul wouldn't call the people at Corinth "stupid," consider what he addresses next.

The primary problem at Corinth is divisions. The first division Paul addresses arises when people try to make the church about themselves and particular pastors instead of about Christ. Some members are apparently claiming superior spirituality based upon the person who baptized them or at least led them to profess their faith.

*<sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." <sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 1 Cor 1:12-13*

Paul reemphasizes that the Church is about Jesus Christ and that he preached only Christ Crucified for our sins.

Other disputes arise when people try to demonstrate their superior knowledge of the faith. Some argue that, since there is only one God, eating the meat sacrificed to pagan Gods is not a problem. Paul points out that this is just another way of making the Church about them instead of Christ. If someone recently converted from a pagan tradition sees other Christians eating the meat sacrificed to pagan gods, they might be lured back to pagan worship. Rather than building themselves up by demonstrating their knowledge and wisdom, they should focus on how to share Christ with the community.

Others argue that people should not marry because Christ will soon return. They should instead focus on Christ. Although Paul apparently follows a celibate lifestyle, he acknowledges that God created us as sexual beings and that it was not a problem to marry. However, simply because our sins were forgiven, sexual immorality could not be tolerated in the community.

Paul also chides those who are seeking to convince others of their spiritual superiority by speaking in tongues. He notes that although speaking in tongues is a gift of the Spirit, it is something that does little to share the Gospel and it can be a distraction. He urges that, unless there is someone standing by to translate, such persons should not interrupt worship with the practice. My personal view is that Paul believed that at least some of these persons were seeking attention instead of experiencing a true encounter with the Spirit. Again, they were making the Church about them instead of about Christ.

The most damaging division in the church is drawn along social and economic lines. This is manifested by the richer people in the church coming together for worship and consuming all the food and wine before the others could arrive. The poorer people and slaves had to do a full day's work before they could leave to worship. This took place at a time when the Lord's Supper was celebrated as a full meal. It is at this point that Paul begins constructing the chain of logic that leads to the proposition that the Church is the Body of Christ.

Earlier, in connection with the dispute involving eating food sacrificed to idols, Paul emphasizes the power of the sacrament to make us one with each other:

*<sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 1 Cor 10:16-17*

Paul then recounts the institution of the Lord's Supper, which is the earliest known account of the practice in Christian literature:

*<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is*

*the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 1 Cor 11:23-26.*

Therefore, Paul reasons, those who take the bread and the cup in an “unworthy manner,” that is without acknowledging that Christ is at the center of the Lord’s Supper, are desecrating the Lord’s Supper.

After establishing that Christ is at the center of the Lord’s supper and that we are made one through the celebration of the Lord’s supper, Paul completes making his case for unity in the Church in Chapters 12 and 13. In chapter 12 he outlines his concept of the Body of Christ. Just as the human body is made up of many different but complimentary and necessary “parts,” so the church is made up of many different but **complimentary and necessary individuals**. He then tells the fractious church at Corinth that they are “the Body of Christ.” 1 Cor 12:27. He does not tell them that they must act correctly to be the Body of Christ, but that God has already made them so. Now it is their duty to act like the Body of Christ. How is that to happen? Look to chapter 13. Paul, in one of the most elegant and moving passages in scripture, outlines the hallmark of the Body of Christ: Christian love.

## 2 Corinthians

Although scholars agree that Second Corinthians was written by Paul, most believe that it is a conflation of two letters to the congregation written at different times. This is based upon the differences in the tone of writing. In parts of Second Corinthians Paul is praising the Church for its faithfulness. In other parts of the letter he is expressing his extreme anger at the Church.

Part of Paul’s letter concerns a problem that Paul also encountered in Galatia. It seems that after Paul established the Church, new evangelists came along with a different version of the gospel. In Galatians these persons were preaching conversion to Judaism. In Corinthians, Paul refers to the new evangelists as “super-apostles.” Apparently they appeared claiming to be richer, better and more powerful than Paul. In a sense, they appear to have been preaching a form of the prosperity Gospel. If you are faithful, God will award you with power and riches. Since Paul was not powerful, rich or particularly eloquent, he was not a true apostle. Paul counters that faithfulness is not demonstrated by strength but rather by total submission to God through Christ. Paul marks his faithfulness by his sufferings for the Gospel, not his personal wealth and power.

Second Corinthians also deals with the issue of stewardship. He discusses an issue that is as contemporary as this morning’s headlines: how much of our wealth should be shared with those less fortunate. In that regard he makes a statement that eloquently sets forth the balance but is hard news for most of us in this nation:

*<sup>8</sup> I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup> For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. <sup>10</sup> And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— <sup>11</sup> now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. <sup>12</sup> For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. <sup>13</sup> I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between <sup>14</sup> your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. <sup>15</sup> As it is written,*  
*“The one who had much did not have too much,  
and the one who had little did not have too little.” 2 Cor 8:8-15*

Paul proclaims that there is such a thing as a fair balance between what we have and what others have. In a society where there is a growing disparity between those with wealth and those with little that is a hard message to hear.

## **Advent Is About God Reaching Into Our World**

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us...*

*John 1:14*

It's Advent or, as many Christians in the rest of the world call it, 'the Christmas Season.' We will soon be hearing the debates about the "true" meaning of Christmas and whether the "true" meaning is lost in all the commercial activity. There will also be those bemoaning the use of 'Holiday Season' over Christmas Season. However, even if you listen closely, you probably won't hear a consistent message from Christians about the true meaning of the season.

For some Christians Advent is about "Peace on Earth," something the world did not experience in Jesus' lifetime or the two thousand years since. For many, it's a "Spirit of Good Will Toward All People," the message exemplified in the classic *Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. For still others, the primary focus is the Christ Child in the manger as the symbol of new life and hope. Yet, while all these aspects certainly have their place in the celebrations of the season, Advent is first and foremost about God reaching into our world.

The writer of John says it best in the verse quoted above. "The Word became flesh and walked among us." The faith claim of Christianity is that God so wanted us to be reconciled to God, that God reached into our world and became a part of our reality. The incarnation, the birth of Christ, is the center of our theology. The atoning sacrifice was a reality once God became flesh. Flesh must, at some point, die. Christ's death on the Cross would have no meaning if God had not been made flesh, nor would the resurrection. God took on human life and humanity killed that life. God responded with still more life. God's love cannot be turned away, even when confronted with the worst humanity can do.

The word Advent literally means "coming." God came into our reality. God sought us out where we live. In that act is the Gospel, the Good News. In that act is the hope of "Peace on Earth and Good Will to All People."

## **Advent at Trinity UMC**

### **Celebrating Communion during Advent**

You have heard me say that Christians are a people of the cross and the table. The Table of the Lord is an especially powerful symbol for the church. Everyone gathers around that table bringing all of who they are, good and bad, to the table. Around the table we pray that God make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world. In other words, we pray that God empower us as the Body of Christ.

During the four Sundays of advent, on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day we will celebrate communion during each worship service. This is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament for our lives as disciples. It is also appropriate, as we prepare to celebrate the incarnation of God, that we remember each week the words of Christ as he prepared to die for us. "Do this in remembrance of me."

### **Friday December 16<sup>th</sup> : Serving Lunch at the Last Minute Toy Store**

On December 16<sup>th</sup> Trinity UMC will be serving lunch for the workers at the Last Minute Toy Store at 61<sup>st</sup> Ave. UMC. Lunch is served from 11:00 to around 4:00. If you are interested in volunteering please contact Charles Wilson.

### **Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup>: Lessons and Carols and Blue Christmas**

During Worship on December 18<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate with a traditional service of Lessons and Carols. This service reminds us, through scripture and song, of the promised coming of Christ and God's Love for the World.

It is also our tradition to include a **Blue Christmas** Observance on the Fourth Sunday in Advent. The Christmas Season is not a time of joy for all people, especially those who have lost a loved one. For many such people the coming of the holidays only emphasizes the loss in their lives and the grief that they feel. Also, for the many people dealing with sickness and chronic disease and for those suffering depression, the coming of the holidays and the unfulfilled desire to feel Joy can be quite painful. Along with communion on the fourth Sunday in Advent we will also offer an anointing for healing. The anointing is merely making the sign of the cross on your forehead with olive oil, coupled with a prayer for healing in body and spirit. Anointing is one of the oldest liturgies in the Church and one recommended by scripture. James 5:13-15. Consider making this simple act of devotion a part of your observance of Advent.

### **Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 PM: Christmas Concert and Carol Sing Led by the Nashville Singers.**

The Nashville Singers will be with us once again on December 18<sup>th</sup> to offer a concert of Seasonal Music and lead us in singing traditional Christmas Carols. A reception with light Refreshments will follow.

### **Saturday December 24<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 PM: Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service**

It's Christmas Eve. Let's face it. If it's not done by now it probably won't get done. It's time to stop and remember why this day is celebrated by billions the world over. Gather with us for a traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service.

### **Sunday December 25<sup>th</sup>: Christmas Day Worship and Fellowship: 10:00 to Noon.**

Every five or six years, Christmas Day falls on a Sunday. We will not hold Sunday School but we will gather between 10:00 and 11:00 to share in fellowship and a light breakfast. At 11:00 we will gather for worship. Children (of all ages) are invited to come in their pajamas. We will worship with scripture and song and celebrate the Birth of Christ.

## **The Advent Wreath**

<sup>2</sup> *For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.* <sup>3</sup> *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*  
*Isaiah 60:2-3 NRSV*

Who is Christ to you? Why is Christ important to you and to the world? The liturgical meanings behind the Advent Wreath seek to provide answers to those questions.

Many Christians want to separate their “religious life” and their “secular life.” We have often been raised to think of our faith as something personal and something that can be separated from our day to day activities. Yet the Old Testament Prophets, Jesus, the Apostles and other writers of the New Testament rejected the idea that we can separate our religious lives from our secular lives. They taught that there is only life and the choice to live that life in relation to God or something else. The Advent Wreath is a liturgical symbol of Christ as the center of our existence. Each week we light a different candle on the Advent Wreath.

**Christ our Hope:** The first week of Advent we acknowledge that Christ is our hope for salvation of the world. The lectionary readings focus on those passages of scripture that speak of God ending time. One of the most powerful images comes from Isaiah 25:

<sup>6</sup> *On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*  
<sup>7</sup> *And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;*  
<sup>8</sup> *he will swallow up death forever.*  
*Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken.*  
<sup>9</sup> *It will be said on that day,  
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.  
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Isaiah 25:6-9 NRSV.*

Isaiah envisions a great feast where God is not only the host but a loving parent. God will remove the “shroud” from the world; the constant fear of sin and death that clouds our existence. God will wipe away all tears and bring salvation. Christ as hope for the world reminds us that, regardless of what happens, this is God’s world and that ultimately God will bring salvation to the world.

**Christ the Way:** The emphasis of the Second Sunday in Advent is Christ as the way we are to live our lives. Typical of the lectionary readings for this day is Romans 15:4-6:

<sup>4</sup> *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. NRSV*

When we are baptized or confirmed, we are not pledging our allegiance to God and Christ. We instead profess to adopt a new way of living in the world that is focused on God and patterned on the life and teachings of Christ. We cannot separate this religious commitment from our daily lives because we acknowledge that the lives we live will reflect our faith and beliefs.

**Christ our Joy:** This is the theme for the Third Sunday in Advent. The color purple is most often associated with penitence. Three candles of the Advent Wreath are traditionally purple recognizing that we have turned our lives away from God and need to repent; that is turn back to God. Traditionally, the Third Sunday in Advent the candle is pink which is a color associated with Joy. We celebrate that Joy is another name for Christ. We believe that our Joy is founded on God’s act in Jesus Christ. My favorite advent reading for the Third Sunday in Advent is from Philippians:

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. *Phillipians 4:4-7 NRSV*

For many it is hard to fathom how we can “rejoice” in the face of the evil in the world. It might help put this verse in context to know that, when Paul wrote it, he was in prison facing possible execution by the Romans. Paul could rejoice because, come what may, salvation was assured through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

**Christ the Prince of Peace:** On the Fourth Sunday in Advent we celebrate Christ as a living presence in this world. We celebrate Christ as the one always with us and who constantly calls us to peace. One of the advent readings commonly used on the fourth Sunday in Advent is from Matthew:

*“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

<sup>22</sup> *All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

<sup>23</sup> *“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.” Matthew 1:20-23 NRSV.*

The promise of Emmanuel is God with us. Ours is a living faith, and we acknowledge that there is not a moment of the day that Christ is not with us. As Jesus stated in Matthew 28:20, “I am with you always, to the end of the Age.”

**The Christ Candle:** Finally, there is the Christ Candle, the large white candle in the center of the Wreath that is lit on Christmas Eve. White is the color of new life and, in our tradition, it is also the color of death and resurrection. The white candle in the Advent Wreath symbolizes all three of those ideas. We remember the night of the incarnation; the night Christ was born. We acknowledge that, with his birth as a human child, God accepted the inevitability of a human death, the atoning sacrifice. And we are reminded of Easter Sunday and the defeat of sin and death through the resurrection of Christ. Lighting of the Christ Candle also symbolizes God’s promise to bring light into the world:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1*

The next time you look at the Advent Wreath, take a moment to reflect on who Christ is and God’s act of salvation through Jesus Christ.

## **Preacher, What Does the Bible Say about ...?**

From the time I came to Trinity I have stated on numerous occasions that I am willing to consider a sermon, or sermon series, on any subject that is of concern. If there is a subject upon which you would like me to preach I will consider it. If I do not think it appropriate for a sermon I will explain why. It might also be appropriate to address some issues as part of a Newsletter article or series or as part of the Sunday School curriculum. But, if at all possible, I will seek to speak to these issues that are of interest on Sunday morning.

One purpose of worship is to contemplate our relationship with God and if something is bothering you it is likely bothering others as well.

## **Thursday Morning Bible Study**

The Thursday Morning Bible Study Group meets weekly on Thursdays from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. The group has decided that it will not meet until after the first of the year. We will meet again on January 12<sup>th</sup> and continue our study of Genesis.

## **Prayer Ministry**

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Leslie Eastwood	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

## **Up-Coming Sermons**

**December 18<sup>th</sup>: Lessons and Carols. Blue Christmas. (See above)**

**December 25<sup>th</sup>: New Life.** Want to know the meaning of Christmas? It's about New Life.

## **Worship Leaders**

### **December 18**

Ken Strait, **Liturgist**

Dawn and Richard Stevens, **Greeters**

Maurice and Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

### **December 25**

No worship leaders required

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**GraceWorks** has a shortage on many items in our food pantry, and we need your help restocking it! Here is a list of some very critical items needed in our food pantry: **Critical Needs:** Canned green vegetables (not green beans), Canned beans, Canned meat (not tuna), Cereal, Hamburger Helper type boxed meals, Soup. Please support this important ministry with your regular donations. The box is located beside the side door.

**Hosts and Hostesses for First Sunday Lunch:** Please see the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Please add your name to host this occasion for the coming months.

**The Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School Class** is both learning and enjoying a series of videos, narrated by Ray Vanderlann. The videos as well as the narration take place in ancient lands described in the Old Testament. We enjoy discussion about what we are learning and the application of the lessons to our lives. We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

### **Birthdays in December**

Jake Fetting, Pam Jones, Dorise LeCates, Hal Newman, Lindsey Aldred, Brandon Stewart, Rachel Newman,  
Ben Stafford

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**