

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI

Pastor Mark Gartner

**Sermon for Pentecost 8 -- July 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 (Farewell Sermon)**

### **1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,  
2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy  
people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their  
Lord and ours: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him  
you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— 6 God thus  
confirming our testimony about Christ among you.**

**7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ  
to be revealed. 8 He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of  
our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus  
Christ our Lord.**

Dear followers of the God who know God's justice and live in God's forgiveness. Amen

If I say, "What happens in \_\_\_\_\_ stays in \_\_\_\_\_", I think most of you could fill in the blanks. You know from its reputation that I am speaking about the city of Las Vegas. Whether it is deserved or not, the city of Las Vegas has received the reputation of a city that you can visit and do any number of things that might be inappropriate and it is OK because no one needs to find out.

You might be thinking, why would Pastor Gartner be talking about these things in his farewell sermon? The connection comes from the words that Paul just recorded for us in his first letter written to the city of Corinth. Corinth was in many ways the equivalent to our Las Vegas. It was a large bustling port city that was full of money, full of visitors traveling through and the many sinful things that can go along with that lethal combination. In the middle of this sinful city, we will see some wonderful God-given blessings.

While Watertown and St. Luke's Church are not Las Vegas or Corinth, they are still a city and a church that are full of many similar things. There is lots of sin. There are lots of sinners and more importantly there are many sinners who have been touched by God's life changing Gospel. As we walk through Paul's words today and as we think of God's blessings over the past 19 years of my ministry and life here in Watertown and at St. Luke's, the only thing that comes to mind for a theme is:

**Sermon Theme: Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!**

- 1. For God's grace**
- 2. For God's gifts**
- 3. For God's promises**

## 1. For God's Grace

If you were in charge of scouting out mission fields back in the time of the Apostle Paul, would you think the sinful city of Corinth would have made your list? Maybe asking a few questions will get us to look at things a little differently. Why would starting a new church in Corinth seem like an impossible mess? Earthly speaking, you could come up with all kinds of reasons why this doesn't sound like a good idea – some of which we named earlier. The second question is this, Why would starting a church in Corinth seem like a beautiful idea? You notice that there are two ways of looking at this picture. The second question isn't looking at the earthly sinful mess. The second question is looking at lost souls that need to hear of God's crushing Law and his soothing and forgiving Gospel. It is interesting to note that the Apostle Paul spent 1 ½ years in Corinth which was his second longest stay in any of his mission cities.

As we sit here today, the first reason that we can say Thank You is found in the words that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, **“<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.”** It was God's grace that changed the hearts and minds and eternal wellbeing of the people in Corinth and it is God's grace that has continued to change the hearts and minds of the people in Watertown and for our purposes here at St. Luke's. Did you hear what he called the Christians in Corinth and for that matter the Christians of Watertown and St. Luke's, **“called to be his holy people.”** He calls us, **“holy people.”** That is what grace has done and will continue to do. It makes us holy and righteous in God's eyes. As I look back at the past 19 years, it is that word of “grace” and making us holy that stands out. Without those words there is no St. Luke's and there is no Gospel ministry here in Watertown or St. Luke's and there is no Pastor Gartner coming to St. Luke's.

While I have had the privilege of serving here for 19 years – which by the ways seems like a long time. Note for historical sake: Pastor Schultz has been here for 26 years. Pastor Vomhof served for 20 years and Pastor Uetzman served for 30 years – all longer than my ministry. But all of those years combined seem quite a small time when you consider the many shepherds the Lord has sent to St. Luke's over its 169 years of God's grace and mercy. Did you catch that number? 169 years of God's grace here at St. Luke's. My 19 years are just a drop in the bucket of the grace that God has poured out on this group of believers. And if you want to look even bigger, back up God's grace all the way to the Garden of Eden and the first Gospel promise that God made to the first sinners -- Adam and Eve. His grace has been abounding for thousands of years. The reassuring part in this for Paul as he wrote to the Christians in Corinth and for us as the members of St. Luke's is that God's grace will not end when I leave. God's grace is certainly bigger than me or any Pastor for that matter and each and every week after I leave you will hear this same message of grace from this pulpit and in these classrooms and in your Bible studies. For this -- the only thing I can say is Thank You For God's Grace!

## 2. For God's Gifts

God's grace changed the lives of the people of Corinth. This is very evident in the blessings that God poured out on this congregation, **<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God . . . <sup>5</sup>For in him you have been**

**enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—<sup>6</sup> God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”** What Paul was thanking God for was the many spiritual blessings that he had given to the Christians in Corinth. They had been **“enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge”**. They did **“not lack any spiritual gift.”** As you looked at this group of believers in Corinth they had many God-given talents and abilities. They were not lacking in any area as far as spiritual gifts. This did not mean that they were perfect Christians. Quite the opposite -- We know that Paul had to write this first letter to address some pretty serious spiritual sins, but as saints and holy people they still could serve God and others with these many gifts as they lived on this earth.

As saints and sinners gathered around God’s Word and Sacraments here at St. Luke’s, I can only marvel and say Thank You to God for all the spiritual gifts that he has given to this group of believers here at St. Luke’s and our TSL Grade School. We are not perfect here at St. Luke’s – far from it. But we are saints by the blood of Jesus who having been blessed tremendously by our gracious God can use these many gifts. One example: Over the past 19 years I have been blessed to serve with 7 faithful men who served as Congregational Presidents – men who certainly were enriched in every way by God grace:

- |                |                   |                     |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Tom Schultz | 4. Tony Schadt    | 6. Jerry Vomhof     |
| 2. Steve Ehlke | 5. George Zaferos | 7. Scott Wiedenhoef |
| 3. Tim Probst  |                   |                     |

I served with three faithful Visitation Pastors;

- |                      |                           |                      |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Pastor John Jeske | 2. Pastor Wayne Schneider | 3. Pastor Lance Hoff |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|

I have had the privilege and joy to serve with the many teachers of TSL. Anyone want to guess how many teachers that might be? **32!** Try and name all 32! You can ask me later if you are missing a few. How many of those 32 have I had the privilege and joy to serve all 19 years with? **5!** Can you name the 4? Mr. Moeller, Mrs. Ehlke, Mr. Birkholz, Mr. Torgerson and Cheryl Holzhueter. God has certainly blessed me, St. Luke’s and our TSL with many gifts

I have worked for 19 years with a faithful Associate Pastor whose heart and life is on fire with God’s gifts and talents -- Pastor Schultz. There is not enough time to share all the gifts and blessings that God has shared with me and this congregation through this very faithful servant of Christ. And to take these blessings further, I think the list would be endless for all those who have served as helpers in our Day School and teachers and helpers in our Sunday School and on our various Boards and Committees of the Council and other various groups of this congregation. If I had everyone stand up who has served in some way with their God-given gifts, I’m pretty sure the whole church would stand at this time. For all of these gifts given from our good and gracious God, I say Thank You!

### 3. For God's Promises

Paul concludes this introduction to the Corinthians with this little statement, **“I always thank my God . . . <sup>8</sup> He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”** In this little section, we see Paul giving strength and encouragement to the people of Corinth. He doesn't give them false hope that everything will be easy in this life. He instead reminds them that God and God alone, **“will keep them firm to the end.”** He reminds them that God and God alone will make sure that they **“will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** He reminds God and God alone **“is faithful”**. Just as Jesus reminded his disciples as he was leaving this world, **“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)** God in his infinite wisdom and his boundless love and his almighty power and his never ending faithfulness promised to keep the Christians in Corinth firm and safe until Jesus called them home to heaven.

As we close today, we think about what these words mean for us. Are these promises any different or less powerful or effective than they were to the people in Corinth? Obviously not! 19 years ago, the Voters of St. Luke's gathered to call their first Associate Pastor. I'm not sure how Pastor Schultz was doing all the work by himself before that but that is another amazing blessing. God led them to call a young 32 year old Pastor who had been serving at Grace Lutheran Church in Charlotte, NC for 7 years. God by the Holy Spirit moved me to accept that Call. I was installed on Sunday May 17, 1998 to be the Associate Pastor of St. Luke's in Waretown.

On May 24, 1998 I preached my first sermon. I preached on Acts 16:6-10 where God came to Paul in a dream in the night and told him that he was going to change his plans and he should now go and minister to the people of Macedonia. The theme of that sermon was **“The Holy Spirit Has The Perfect Plan For Us.”** The gist of that sermon was that God has a road map found in God's Word that he has laid out for his church at large and for his people here at St. Luke's. At times this road map will seem easy to read and follow and at times this road map will seem difficult and almost impossible. The events of the last 19 years were all part of this plan and of God's promises to bless his people here at St. Luke's and even today in a time of change, we see God plans to bless St. Luke's and the many other sheep of his flock throughout his Kingdom. God's perfect plan and God's perfect promises of faithfulness and helping us to reach our eternal goal of heaven doesn't end today. It is just another mile marker on the journey that God has before us. It is another chance for us to look back and marvel how God's grace has changed each and every one of us. It is a chance for us to gather around God's Word and his Sacraments of Baptism and especially today again the Lord's Supper and say Thank You God for your grace, Thank you for your blessings and Thank You for your eternal promises. To God Be the Glory! Amen!

Together in Christ

Pastor Mark Gartner