

I was a <sup>freshman</sup> ~~sophomore~~ in college, 600 miles away from home, trying to act grown up, but still kind of scared. I only knew a few people, but not near enough to shield me from the nameless faces I bumped up against every where I went. Not to sure how I would do in this college far from home, I spent most every minute studying. Not that I really wanted to, but when you're far from home, and friends are few, going into the room, locking out all the world, and forgetting troubles in a book isn't so bad.

Until that night that Phil and Marty knocked on the door, squeaky clean Phil and Marty. They asked if they could come in a minute and being the nice guy that I was I said sure. They sat down on the beds and I thought, some friends at last. But instead of how's it going, or where you from, they're first words were: "Are you saved?"

If you've ever seen turkey buzzards floating down to feast on a carcass, then you know what things were like in that room. Me the carcass, Marty and Phil moving in for the feast.

They came prepared, with Bibles. I should have noticed when <sup>I</sup> they first opened the door but I was so hungry for friends that I had not looked for weapons. Bibles underlined in all the right places were these, so that after a few minutes of reading they could convince me that I was a rotten person with absolutely no hope at all. A sinner, condemned to hell. Did it matter that I already believed in Christ, was baptized, confirmed, planning to enter the ministry? No, they could see that that was all religion, and I remained a sinner in need of saving. And they were here to do it.

Fortunately, ~~and I do mean fortunately~~, I <sup>do</sup> ~~do~~ not have trouble asserting myself, so I very firmly told them, I wasn't interested in their schemes and showed them the door. And I spent the rest of that evening wondering if I'd done the right thing, and if I really believed in Jesus, really believed enough, and if I was saved.

~~Super Christians have a way of doing that to us. Now I'm not talking about Jehovah's witnesses, or Mormons, though they can certainly be troubling, but I'm talking about Christians like Phil and Marty who are always swooping down upon us, sowing doubts in our hearts. Trying to make unbelievers out of believers so they can make them believers once again as their game, so they can chalk up another soul saved, another victory won.~~

~~It's even easy for me as a past or to get in on the game. I can stand here on a~~

Often I will hear of things like this happening to others, of visits by Jehovah's Witnesses that leave good Lutherans wondering. They too show up at the door packing a Bible which they will use to drive a wedge between you and God. "They know their Bible so well," I will hear later, as if knowing words printed on a page means that there is understanding, faith in Jesus Christ. Their one purpose is to sow doubt in the heart of their hearer that they might fill the void with their twisted teachings.

And though we know that as we open the door to them, and though we know that as they question us with the questions for which they have the answer, when that door closes they often have accomplished their first purpose. Do I believe enough, do I know enough? Is what I believe really true, we ask ourselves.

Or <sup>death is some</sup> ~~it~~ may happen as you talk with your neighbor or friend. It's such a joy to be a Christian he says. And he smiles so much, and though you've seen those Christians with painted on smiles, like the ones on TV, this one is real. And there is so much love when he's around, so little judgement or belittling.

And again the doubt, the wondering.

Now I can't be sure that's how it is with you, but it's easy for me to feel a second class Christian. I imagine that people must look at me and say: "He ought to be more loving, more kind. His faith ought to be more childlike, more evident." <sup>but some are more heartless</sup> But then I turn to a passage in Paul's writings like the lesson <sup>it is good news</sup> we have before us today and I am confident in God's love for me.

I hear it first in Paul's words ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> the church which is in Corinth, to those 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. Sanctified in Christ Jesus, that is Paul's description of the Corinthians. Made holy, sanctified. Now what might they be like. Purely to be called Holy they must be loving, peaceful, caring, moral. A model congregation if someone as great as Paul would call them Holy.

Well a partial list of the problems Paul addresses in this one congregation would be the following: division in the congregation, rich not mixing with the poor, disorder and disruption in their worship, arguments over whether they could eat food used in pagan worship, a man ~~having~~ <sup>having</sup> sexual relations with his step mother, drunkenness at the Lord's Supper, <sup>having sexual relations with prostitutes</sup>



For our ways of thinking this was the least Holy group of people imaginable. But Paul calls them Holy.

And not only that, listen to his next words: I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Jesus Christ, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge- even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

That's how Paul began his letter to the Corinthians, two sentences later Paul is right in the middle of the problem of divisions and factions in the congregation, which we will consider next week, but before he talks about problems, Paul tells them how things are.

And the way things are is God can be counted on, and Jesus will sustain them to the end, guiltless in the day of Jesus Christ. And that's the way things are for us as well.

Jesus can be counted on. And if I'm not loving as some think I should be that's not a good thing for Paul writes to the Corinthians about love in the 13th chapter. And if I have improper understanding Paul might be speaking to me when he speaks of babes in Christ. And if I speak against other denominations and if there is disunion between us that is not God's will. Even that there be disagreement between me and some of you, and I declare I have true understanding and you do not, that certainly ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> displeasing to God. But Jesus can be counted on. For the Corinthians had all these problems, and Paul was confident that Christ would sustain them.

And I wish that I had known this when Phil and Marty stopped by, for I would have told them, Christ is faithful. You ask of me, if my faith is sufficient, my goodness sufficient, my understanding sufficient, and I will not answer of myself but of Christ. Christ is sufficient in the task of saving me, of myself I can not know, of him I can be sure.

So Luther said we ought to respond when Satan accused. Satan I am baptised, I may be full of sin, but Christ is even fuller of forgiveness, forgiveness that is mine for I am baptised.

Now I don't know if the Corinthians ever changed. In our Bible we have two letters to them, some scholars say that these two really contain three or four letters Paul wrote to them which are combined. I don't know if they were ever <sup>more</sup> pleasing to God, or whether Paul needed to write them again and again. But whether they did change or whether they continued to be a problem for Paul Christ did sustain them <sup>in the end</sup> guiltless. They did not trust in him and count on him in vain. Of that we can be sure.

And sure that we will not count on Christ in vain. For though we be filled with doubt about ourselves and our own goodness, we need never doubt Christ and his goodness. And though we fail to live as we know we will should, we can be sure that Christ will not fail us. He will sustain us <sup>to the end</sup> <sup>live</sup> guiltless ~~to~~ the day of Jesus Christ.