

I had a dream. I dreamed of being a pastor. I would serve in a congregation in which we would be united in purpose, in dedication. One in faith, one in love like a disciplined army we would attack unbelief and hunger and poverty. Empowered by God enemy after enemy would be overcome. Though the world would struggle mightily against us, God's gifts of peace and joy and hope would lift us over every obstacle. Yes, that's the way I dreamed it would be.

But then I became a pastor.

It has been nearly twelve years now. And it feels as if the army has yet to go into a single battle. I thought ^{we} it would be ~~us~~ against the world, but instead it has been we against us. Bickering, complaining, finding fault with every change, ~~every attempt~~ while the world needs our witness more than ever we are lost in a swamp of discontent. Among the people called to faith and hope and love, mistrust seems our closest companion.

I always imagine, how different it was for St. Paul. As he journeyed preaching the gospel, faith sprung up like wild flowers on the prairie. He infiltrated the stronghold of unbelief, establishing outposts of life and love and forgiveness. He preached with the power of God and people were believed and were changed.

O, and he knew the enemy well. He had been on the other side, attacking, violently persecuting the church of Christ. But now he led the charge as the church of Jesus Christ sought to over run every encampment of the enemy.

But then he glanced back.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel, not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Everything was falling apart in the army behind him.

Not only in the region of Galatia, but in Corinth, and Thessalonica,

^{Enemy}
the ¹ raged increasingly within the church.

In Galatia the enemy had Christians believing that Jesus had not done enough. Yes, they said, believe in Jesus, but you also must be circumcized as a Jew, and worship on the Sabbath, Saturday, and observe Jewish dietary laws. Paul knew that this was abandoning the gospel in that in Jesus Christ God has done everything needed for our salvation. Believe in Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

In Corinth the attack was from the opposite direction. Since Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation it matters not what we do. The situation there became a chaotic everyone seeking his own advantage or pleasure.

In both cases the army that is the church was halted.

We ought not be surprised then ~~when~~^{why?} it happens to us. This is the enemy's first line of attack, to demobilize the army of God. In Galatia, in Corinth, in Hettinger everywhere that the name of Jesus Christ is named Satan seeks to turn us against one another that we might forget who is our real enemy, where the real battle is to be fought. For if he can get us all worked up about how much we are paying the pastor, or how long the worship service is or angry because they won't cooperate with what I want to do, then the enemy is safe from attack. Then we don't have time to help parents preach the gospel to their children, and bring healing to broken homes and to visit the sick. When we withhold our giving because they are not doing things my way, then the hungry go without bread, and the gospel is not preached to those who have never heard.

This morning ~~as~~^{as} I preach this sermon to you, I preach it to myself so very much more. I confess to you and to God how many times I begin to think that you are the enemy. ^{When you will follow where I want to lead, when you don't appreciate what I do, all I begin to think is} You, the saints of God, the baptized into Christ. Instead of fighting against sin and death, I lose hope and I give up on you. And Satan has his way.

Now God wants his way in me, and in you. Every time bitterness and anger and pettiness and pride rise up in your hearts, God wants them drowned

in the waters of our baptism. He wants us to look at one another as he sees us, his beloved children washed clean through the blood of Christ. He wants us to treat one another as ~~we~~ we would treat Christ himself, with love and affection and trust. Forgiving, always forgiving.

Paul wrote to the Galatians at a time when he was bitterly disappointed in them, yet he began with this ^{greeting} ~~prayer~~: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sin to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be glory forever and ever.

Grace to you and peace. May God so fill us with his grace and his peace that we will be his witnesses in this present evil age here in Hettlinger and with his church in every place. Amen.