

Write a Good Letter

Pentecost 5/Proper 8 – 2010

Text: 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

One of my favorite songs on my ipod is titled “Letters from Home” by John Michael Montgomery. The lyrics contain the contents of letters written by the father, mother and the future wife of a young man who is serving in the Armed Forces in Iraq.

In our age of electronic transmissions we use email, texting which has a unique style and culture of its own and therefore writing letters is in many cases a lost art, except for important business matters. It is perhaps in the context of important business matters, that St. Paul writes to the church at Corinth reminding them that they the members of the congregation in Corinth are his letters of recommendation.

As is true in every age, some in this Christian congregation which was planted by St. Paul on one of his missionary journeys, were opposing his ministry in Corinth. Among many claims, one was that because he had endured much hardship and suffering, he most certainly was not a true apostle. As a result of such claims, his ministry in this congregation was being undermined. These claims were causing the members to choose sides – being either for or against Paul and therefore disrupting the unity of that congregation.

St. Paul responds in our text to that nonsense, by telling them that he had no need for letters of recommendation from someone outside of that parish, proving that indeed he was a true servant of Christ. The proof says Paul is all around you. The proof is in what was going on in that parish.

The proof was in the members of the parish – in how through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they not only believed, they also were living much different lives than they were before coming to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. They, says Paul are his letters of recommendation and nothing more is needed.

Paul doesn't claim that it's all about him and his ability to be an apostle – rather he says the confidence he has comes through Christ. “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God who made us competent to be ministers of the new covenant....” He had already reminded the Corinthians that it was by the grace of God that he was who he was. And so, by the grace of God he was a called servant of God, who proclaimed Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. And it was by the grace of God that they – through the power of the Holy Spirit working through that Gospel message – had come to faith in the Triune God and received salvation.

I came to this parish seven plus years ago called by God to minister to you – to like Paul share the Good News of Christ Jesus as man's only hope for eternal life and salvation. I came because the Holy Spirit led me to this parish and while like Paul - as is always the case – there are some who are disappointed or refused to except that ministry and message, - yet there are thanks be to God - ample letters of recommendations. Those letters are being written daily by you the members of St. John's Lutheran and parents of our school. They are being written by the young and the old – life long Lutherans and by newly converted members. They are being written by the good deeds and the testimony given to the power and sovereignty of God. And sometimes they are real letters written on paper such as the ones I received the past several weeks.

That, however, does not mean that there are no more letters to write – no in fact by God’s grace the letter writing will continue – but not just any letters – not letters which divide – not letters that seek personal advantage – not letters which smack of plotting and scheming – rather letter which are filled with Holy Spirit’s gifts of peace, love, unity, respect of those who lead and more. I have full confidence in you ability to write good letters, because the Holy Spirit has called you through the waters of Holy Baptism and continues to nourish the faith through the Word and Blessed Sacrament. This morning good letters are being written when two young men will receive their First Communion – pray that they be found often at the Lord’s Table – good letters are being written because members are willing to serve their Lord and this parish as leaders. Pray for them daily as they lead and serve you and their Lord.

Yes I have full confidence in you for Judy and I have ministered among you and you have written good letters of recommendation. We have been blessed by you and thank God for the opportunity we had to serve at St. John’s. There are many more letter to write. Continue by the grace of God to write them. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.