

Good morning. On behalf of Pack and Troop 358, I would first like to express thanks and appreciation from the scouts, leaders, and parents of our organization for the support this congregation provides to the troop in so many ways. We are blessed by the generous way you provide us with meeting space, financial support, prayer, and other contributions to the growth and development of the youth that are a part of our program.

Hopefully you were able to look at some of the pictures on your way in this morning, featuring a few of our events. While one of highlights is always summer camp, usually in July, winter is also an eventful season. Last Saturday, for instance, the scouts met here at the church at 6:15am and drove to Camp Wopsononock, which is north of Bellwood, for the annual Klondike Derby. The weather this weekend has been rather sunny and warm, but we can remind you that the temperatures last weekend were not so mild. When we arrived at the event, the thermometer was showing 2 degrees. But we were dressed in layers and, with no wind and continually moving around, it didn't probably feel as cold as it actually was. The full-day event lasted until after 5pm and featured seven stations that each featured a different challenge. Some of these challenges included a simulated ice rescue, a knot-tying relay race, a lashing project, shot-gun shooting, map-reading, and several others. The scouts were even scored on their lunch. For most scouts, lunch looks something like this (foil-packed food item that can be warmed over a fire).

One of the rules of the derby is that leaders cannot talk to or help the scouts in any way when they are working at each of the stations. By the time the scouts set out with their sled to their first station, we must trust that preparation and teaching over the last weeks, months, and years has provided what they will need to meet the challenges they face throughout the day.

The Apostle Paul was a follower of Christ who devoted a great deal of his life to helping teach and lead others, both people in his time and, through the scriptures, people today like you and me.

- Without the benefit of technology like cellphones, the internet, or television, Paul relied on face-to-face speaking engagements.
- Which means he was often in the position of having to trust that his teaching at one moment in time would be sufficient preparation for when his listeners were away from him.
- So when he occasionally received word that things weren't going well, he had to intervene in the only way he could - by writing a letter. As a result, we are blessed with many of his God-inspired words that continue to help us face our own challenges today.

So for leaders, parents, coaches, teachers, patrol leaders, or **anyone** who has attempted to prepare or teach someone, today's Second Reading from 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 describes a situation that we can relate to.

Actually, let me provide some extra context with Chapter 1 verses 2 and 11-12.

“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.”
My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you is saying “I follow Paul”; another “I follow Apollos”; another “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ”.

So, Paul, who had spent time teaching them in person, but has moved on to teach elsewhere, has learned that there are problems back in Corinth. As a high school classroom teacher, it's like getting that dreaded report from a substitute teacher that things did not go well while you were at home sick the day before. So, from his far-off location, the best Paul can do is write a letter to the Corinthians and re-visit his lessons.

Before we get too hard on the Corinthians, let's remember a few things. First, they were brand new followers of Christ. They were not raised among God's people, among the people of Israel, but in Greece and in a culture that worshiped many other gods. Secondly, Paul had only been able to spend a limited amount of time with them in person before he moved on to other cities and places. And so he does his best to follow up on his earlier visit.

So in Chapter 3, Verse 1, he says:

“Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?”

Having been instrumental in introducing the Corinthians to Christ, Paul's goal was for them to grow in the Spirit and to be united as a community of believers. As their teacher and encourager, Paul could see there was more work to do.

And as we read his instruction to them in this situation, there are certainly several crucial points that can be helpful to us in our own relationship with God and with each other. Let's try to apply today's scripture in Corinthians to our own time and context.

1. First, our readiness dictates what we receive.
 - a. Paul describes it as milk vs. solid food.
 - b. As a guy who knew he would only have limited time in any one place with any one group of people, do you wonder why Paul cared about how ready they were? It's now or never, right?
 - c. Or maybe he was trying to hold something back? Was there some requirement, some dues that needed paid before Paul would reveal the deepest truths of God's desire for them?
 - d. No, Paul saw his role as being like a gardener, sowing a seed.

- e. When it comes to planting a seed, a gardener must know the difference between too shallow, too deep, and just the right depth.
 - f. When it comes to teaching and encouraging others, whether it be first aid or putting faith in Christ, we also must be aware of what is too shallow, too deep, and just the right depth.
 - g. The basics of using a scout knife before being able to make intricate carvings. Learning a square knot before a taut-line hitch. Finding middle C on a piano before looking at an original score by Mozart.
 - h. Without incremental learning, beginners become overwhelmed. Frustrated. They may even quit before they really get started. Even when it comes to faith. The good news is, the more time you spend planting seeds, the more you learn what the right depth is for each seed.
2. But there's another part of Paul's message to us today from his letter to the Corinthians that related to both success in Scouting and effectiveness as a community of believers. If we pick up where we left off in 1 Corinthians, Paul is about to go into a little more detail about the argument problem that has been causing trouble in Corinth.

Starting with verse 4:

“For when one says “I belong to Paul” and another “I belong to Apollos”, are you not merely human?” What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.”

Without question, Paul was an tremendously important person when it comes to helping people build a relationship with God. People like the Corinthians, the Romans, the Galatians, even ourselves today, have come to understand God more fully through his writings. If anyone could have been justified in settling this debate by placing himself at the top of the chain, it may have been Paul. But he does just the opposite. If we go back for a moment to Chapter 2 verses 1-2:

“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

- a. In these verses, along with those in today’s reading, Paul makes it clear that his goal in teaching and preaching is not to emphasize what *he* knows or doesn’t know.
- b. He recognizes that his role is just one among many others who are equally important as servants of God. He sees that the more the Corinthians focus on him or Apollos or any other human leader, the more they lose sight of God and his power.
- c. As I shared earlier, one of the rules of the Klondike derby is that leaders cannot talk to or help the scouts in any way when they are working at each of the stations.
 - i. Obviously, as a competition, part of this rule’s purpose is out of fairness so that each team is no team has an unfair advantage over another team when it comes to earning the highest score possible.

- ii. But this rule also aligns with the general goal of providing youth with increasing opportunities for responsibility, leadership, and growth.

One of our troop's favorite stories could probably be called "Ted - What's For Dinner?"

1. In the early stages, youth are not ready yet to completely take on large tasks like preparing meals for the entire troop.
2. One of our leaders, Ted Reynolds, is a master at outdoor cooking and has helped the scouts learn everything from menu planning and budgeting to food preparation.
3. But, in the beginning, they leaned rather heavily on Ted for his expertise.
4. It seemed to peak at one particular week-long campout when poor Ted hardly had a moment of peace between questions of "Hey Ted - what's for dinner? Hey Ted, what's for dinner?"
5. If you've ever had a small child inundate you with question after question, imagine a whole troop of scouts constantly asking.
6. All of this despite the fact that Ted always makes sure a menu of the week's meals is posted if only the scouts will check it.
7. On one weekend campout, I think Ted intentionally listed "Broccoli Juice" for each meal just to see if the scouts would check it.
8. Fortunately, as you would expect, the scouts have been able to grow into this responsibility of planning meals, preparing budgets, and preparing the food.
9. But Ted - What's for Dinner was a hard habit to break.

10. It's been a work in progress, but the point is this: Whether planning meals or solving Klondike challenges, building capacity in youth for leadership and responsibility is an essential part of helping them grow.

iii. And as they grow, they become more ready for the next challenge. Ready for more solid food.

iv. As adult leaders, together with parents, and with this church, we work together for the common purpose of providing the Scouting program to the youth of this community.

v. Helping beginning members have positive experiences, build character, and start on the path of learning new skills.

vi. Helping older members set and achieve goals, encouraging them as they learn to overcome challenges and accomplish more difficult tasks.

vii. As they become more aware each day of opportunities to demonstrate what it means to be trustworthy, kind, and reverent.

d. Likewise, this same principle applies to the community of faith.

i. Working together, we can strengthen and encourage each other as we each pursue a deeper personal relationship with our God and our Savior.

ii. We are not 'of Paul' or 'of Apollos', rather we are all one in Christ.

iii. In Christ, we work together each day in our community

1. to plant seeds - just deep enough

2. to provide water - in just the right amount

3. and to recognize still that it is God's grace and power, not our own efforts, that brings growth and salvation.