

April 19, 2015 “The Fundamentals” 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

One of the things we all lose sight of is that every one of the disciples of Jesus started out, sitting or standing nearby, listening to what Jesus was saying. Learning. Unable to see it they were growing in faith, they were growing in understanding, they were growing in the grace of God. That is the key connection between you and I and Matthew, James, John, Peter and the other eight. I say the twelve! I have included Judas in the list for this reason, up to a point Judas was doing exactly what James and John and Peter and Matthew were doing. We observe it in the life of the church. At some point any one of us may choose....to walk away. Judas, one out of twelve, made that choice. But those who remained were forever listening, learning, watching, praying, growing. The Spirit of God was with them. In Jesus Christ, they grew in the grace of God.

We tend to call the apostle Paul, the greatest of the disciples. The greatest evangelist. The reason for that is that through the writings of Luke in the Book of Acts we learn about Paul's travels. We learn about his ministry across cultural lines. He was not the first to share faith in Jesus with the Gentiles. But he was the one who made that the focus of his efforts, God leading, Christ being his Lord, the Holy Spirit being his guide. Paul also wrote more material in the New Testament than anyone else. His collection of letters...mostly written to churches in the specific cities or towns for which they are named. One mini set of letters specifically written to Timothy, a young man called to ministry.

Here is my point. Even Paul started out as a learner, a listener, an observer...growing in faith, growing in understanding, growing in the grace of God.

2.

This morning, I have read with you one of the earliest portions of the New Testament. Craig Blomberg received his doctorate in New Testament, specializing in the Gospels and writing a number of acclaimed books on Jesus. He tells us this about 1 Corinthians 15. He writes, “perhaps this is the most important creed in terms of the historical Jesus....Paul uses technical language to tell the Corinthians and to tell us he was passing along the oral tradition in relatively fixed form.”He goes on to say this: “If the crucifixion was as early as AD 30, Paul's conversion was about 32. Immediately Paul was ushered into Damascus, where he

met with a Christian named Ananias and some other disciples. His first meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem, would have been about 35. At some point in that 3 year time line Paul was given this creed, which had already been formulated and was in use in the early church.” The teaching to which Paul refers here in 1 Cor. 15 had crystalized within a year or 2 of the crucifixion. That is really important. It means the fundamentals of the faith had crystalized in that very brief period of 2, at the most 3 years.

“For what I received, I passed on to you.” Paul, a priest of Israel, begins here by telling us he received at the hands of the church that which he is teaching and preaching, sharing and passing on. His credentials if you will, lay with the early church in Damascus and Jerusalem. This is what they taught him following his conversion. And it is only what he received as a baby in Jesus, that he has passed on to those whom he met in his travels and with whom he corresponds.

I say the same thing. It is what I received when I knew very little, other than that I had had an experience out of which I emerged convinced that God is real. That Jesus is alive. That God's

3.

Spirit really touches us...and I needed to know more. I went to Mrs. Brown. She opened the Scriptures to me. My teachers at Knox College built on that foundation. I learned in another spirit at Fuller doing my doctorate, and of course throughout my journeys, the works of the Reformers who were explorers, and students of the Biblical word. It is what we receive in the Christian faith, that we share. It is what we receive at God's hands, through his servants that continues to be the material out of which the church, and the Kingdom of God is ultimately built, God being our helper as well as our Lord. This early creed in 1 Cor. 15 was received by Paul in the historical equivalent of the blink of an eye following the events of Good Friday and Easter morning. The first of the fundamentals involves recognizing we are recipients.

The second is, “What I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins.” Of first importance, “that Christ died for our sins. I wrote from Galilee, telling how moved I was to learn that an excavation 22 feet down overseen by qualified archeologists discovered a stone among the tombs bearing the inscription... “Legion saved.” What the man who gave his name as Legion learned when Jesus

addressed him, was that the sins that drove him mad could be washed away. That Jesus could set him free...indeed did set him free. Brought him to his right mind. Brought him a measure of marvelous peace. For Christians this is of first importance. Paul tells us it has always literally been of first importance to people like us, "Christ died for our sins." It is the very beating heart of the Gospel.

The third of the fundamentals is that we did not make this up, and we did not create this truth. That "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." You have to ignore major parts of the

4.

Gospels to miss that basic truth. You have to delete major parts of the letters written by the apostles to not have to grapple with that message. But here is the thing....it is not just a New Testament message. As the prophet Isaiah wrote so clearly in reference to the Messiah, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And that is precisely why the 23rd Psalm proclaims to us, "HE restores my soul". And were our souls not restored by the Lord how lost we should be. How consumed with hopelessness. How fearful of the fact of our mortality.

This 3rd fundamental, that what Jesus did and accomplished is according to the Old Testament Scriptures, is what keeps the Church from losing its way. In our time there can be no doubting that some of the difficulties the Church, capital C, small c, doesn't matter...some of the hardship we experience is that we have tended to forget, lose sight of or willfully set aside that the true measure of things is found in the Biblical word as opposed to what we might label the knowledge and the wisdom of men. The one thing the Bible continually does is this: it reminds us that God is present and active among us, that our lives are in His hands and therefore no matter our circumstances, we are safe. You know something of my circumstances. I am more than anything else endeavouring to "rest in the grace of God." Because that is where safety lies, salvation lies, and yes the Bible tells me so.

4th fundamental. It is brief. He was buried. As a creedal statement that means they placed the body in the tomb for a reason. Jesus was dead. That's why He was buried. He cried out from the cross, it is finished. Because it was. His blood had been shed. His body was broken.

The reason for which He had come into the world had been served for all to see and witness. So two Jewish priests,

5.

who were at the beginnings of Christian faith, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, placed his body in the tomb. Jesus was dead. So, He was buried.

The 5th fundamental of this creed created so close in time to the first Easter is that the message of Easter has always been linked to the heart of the living heart of Christian experience and Christian faith, “that Jesus was raised on the 3rd day.” You have heard me say it so many times. It transformed the lives of those Jews who were the early Christians. Their traditional worship day was the Sabbath (Shabbat). Saturday. It became the day of the resurrection...Sunday.

The 6th fundamental of this early Creed is that the resurrection is according to the Scriptures of the Old Testament as well. Peter in the Book of Acts 2:24 Peter proclaims, “God raised Jesus from the dead freeing him from the agony of death”. And then he quotes from the Psalm about how God would not let His holy one see decay.” You see, too often we talk about the historic creeds and we get talking about statements from the 3rd of the 7th centuries and we lose sight of the fact that those creeds are based on statements written, affirmed and used so early in the life of the Christian Movement they emerge as it were from ground Zero, shortly after the Crucifixion and the Resurrection occurred.

So what is the 7th and final fundamental? Jesus not only was raised on that 3rd day, He appeared to people who were as a result witnesses. And yes that includes the disciples in the upper room on the Sunday night of the resurrection. The next Sunday night when Thomas was there and saying, “I won't believe unless I can touch those terrible wounds...in his hands, in his feet, in his side. And Jesus

6.

appeared and offered that opportunity. And yes that includes Paul (Saul) who was not a believer, but a persecutor of the Christian Movement, who by that experience became a believer, a disciple, and an apostle. And you see here is the importance that this creed comes from the

years 32-35. Most of the witnesses referred to here were still living. Paul is saying, "Don't take my word for it, go talk to these credible witnesses. There are many of them, several hundreds. Get their stories.

These are the fundamentals of Christian belief. Always have been. Always will be. Til Jesus comes again when we will not need teaching, because we will see with our eyes, and find ourselves bowing before the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords.

Let us pray;

Lord for peace we thank you, peace that you give. We thank you for that which fills us with joy, the desire to rejoice and again I say rejoice! We thank you for faith. Sometimes we are even baffled by how we got here to this point except that you are a Gracious and Redeeming God, beyond our deserving. We thank you for hope, hope in Christ and through Him. Fill us we pray and receive the honour, the glory and the praise.
Amen