

05 February 2023, The 5th Sunday after the Epiphany: I Corinthians 2:1-12

Geri and I attended many conferences at Kanuga Conference Center in North Carolina. One conference remains vivid. There were all sorts and ages attending from small children to retirees. There was instruction, discussion, reflection, humor, and fun. At the Closing Eucharist as the Altar was being prepared, we sang a rousing song and the Celebrant, noticing some squirmy children, invited them to come and dance in front of the Altar. First, two or three came up, then several more until there were 14 or 15 children moving, dancing, singing before the Altar. Then an adult joined them. During the week, this 40-something man had been quietly friendly and shyly helpful, but obvious had intellectual disabilities and social awkwardness. He left his pew, came to the front, and began dancing, swaying, singing with the children. A six- or seven-year-old girl took his hands; they danced and sang together in sweet, spontaneous innocence. For me it was more powerful than any sermon or teaching. A handful of little lives and a weak, wounded life, glorifying God with joyous abandon.

Paul wrote to the new Christians in the sophisticated, wealthy city of Corinth: *My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God...we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden...* (I Cor 2:4, 5).

Among the challenges the Christian Church faces today is what I term the crisis of timidity. We can be so reluctant, inhibited to live our faith as outward, visible signs of God's inward, secret Grace. Some of us grew up hearing the well-worn saying, "Never discuss religion or politics." Rather we talk about the weather, sports teams, or other peoples' faults. We jabber about the latest fashions, cosmetic surgery, or health scares. We analyze and critique events over which we have no say or control. We chatter and gabble, blather and babble, prattle and natter. And we seem captivated by the gab-fest in the media ranting nonsense, half-truths, and whole lives to inflame everyone to one extreme or another. "Never discuss religion or politics," has become a convenient excuse for being a lemming.

Perhaps what holds us back from witnessing to Christ is not fear of conflict, misunderstanding, or rejection—as difficult as they are to endure. Maybe our timidity is the fruit of our fear of inadequacy to be convincing, to have all the answers, or address prejudices about one's parish, denomination, or Christianity in general. Most are not expected to do any of that. Indeed, elsewhere Paul writes, *...avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening* (2 Tim 2:14). In 1 Timothy Paul warns against some who have *...a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words* (6:4b). Some few are called to be Christian Apologists, such as C.S. Lewis, and others. But I do not think most of us are called to that sort of thing, as important as it is. Most Jesus followers are called to simply live in, through and for Christ in our daily lives. As St. Francis of Assisi reportedly said, "Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words."

In Galatians 5:22-23 we find the way of life for Jesus followers: *...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. This is the 'how-to' of our witness to Christ in the world: in our jobs, our homes, our schools, our neighborhoods, our families, with everyone, in all places, continually. This is not a do-it-yourself project. We can only make our lives *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* with God's help. Pray God fill you with Christ's Light and the Holy Spirit's power, that not just your words, but your thoughts and attitudes, your assumptions and principles, your speech and conversation, your work and resting and recreation will witness to everyone of God's love, mercy, and way of life. And for the love of all that is Holy, give thanks and be joyful.

A final thought: don't worry about results, leave everything to God's will. Our Lord will work in you and through you according to Divine wisdom; your part is surrendering your life to Christ. Do the right thing and great things will come to pass. Keep on be an agent, at times a secret agent, of God's mercy. When opportunities are obvious, share gently of God's blessing in your life, and how, for you, Calvary is the place and community for growth in Christ; invite them to 'come and see.'

Practice this prayer: "Lord my God, rescue me from myself, and give me to you. Take away everything that draws me from you, and give me those things that lead me to you; for the sake of Christ our Lord and to your honor and glory. Amen.