

Sermon – Imagine a Church
Rev. Scott Anderson
The Church of the Redeemer
January 15, 2017

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind-- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I would like you all to try something with me this morning. I would like us to try to imagine a church. Not just any church and not just any particular congregation. I would like us to imagine a church where the people of that church had bound themselves together within a new identity that had not been seen in the world before.

This group of people, this church, had seen something, experienced something, that had never been seen or experienced in the world, at least not in human memory. What they saw, and now knew, was so powerful that it changed them. And it defined them. And it motivated them onto a specific path within the world.

This church, this group of people, gathered together with a common mission. It was the common mission that they had experienced as the church was formed. They would pray together, because that is what they had been taught to do. They prayed that God would help them to be something, something that God himself had asked them to be.

People of love. Love for each other because that would be the sign to others that they were different from all the other groups that people could have chosen to be part of.

And they had been asked by God to be people of Love for others. But nothing shallow here. They had seen a different kind of Love, they had experienced a deeper form of Love, a Love that brought people to a different place, into a new existence. A Love that soothed the

heartaches and the struggles, while at the exact same time challenging people, calling people, to a higher place that had been established by God.

This church, this group of people, served and cared for each other. They strengthened each other in a way that prepared them to be strength for others in need who were not in the church. Within their church, they were taught that they existed to serve instead of being served. They were taught to be providers rather than consumers. They realized that they had nothing to sell, nothing to market, but they had everything, everything of true value, at their disposal to give. This group of people understood they were united by a sacred mission within a sacred partnership. And they understood that they were to be something before they could do anything.

This church, this group of people, measured its success by hearts changed and lives transformed rather than pews filled and budgets met. They realized that the trappings and programs of a church are simply tools to bring people into a deeper relationship with God, and if they didn't serve that purpose, they had no value at all.

Can you imagine such a place? Can you imagine such a group of people?

Over the past couple of days, your vestry tried to do just that. We had our retreat and we engaged the exercise of imagining a church that understands itself not as an organization or a club that members join, if they choose to, depending on whether the services and programs suits their requirements. Instead, we imagined a group with the common identity of followers of Jesus who are dedicated to the deepen of that identity through their common association.

We imagined a church that embraced and engaged a mission, but not just their mission as conceived by them within their meeting rooms, but rather God's mission, as given to the church for the sake of the world.

We imagined a church where people gathered together not as consumers of a product but as sacred partners on God's mission. We imagined a church where they understood themselves not as a church of God that has a mission, but rather as following a God of mission who has a church to bring his mission to the world.

Can you imagine such a church? Can you imagine a church that, instead of being a member focused organization that is dedicated to attract and serve a consumer culture, is a disciple building movement, gathered as sacred partners in God's mission to bring life to the world?

We imagined that. And we now invite us into being exactly that church. Over the rest of 2017 and we are going to try to embrace our true identity, our primary identity, as followers of Christ and as a disciple building collection of faithful followers called God's church in the world. And we are then going to see where God will take us.

If you want to get a glimpse of how Paul experienced the church we are imagining, read again his greeting to the faithful in Corinth that we heard this morning. He saw a group of people sanctified by Jesus Christ. He saw saints. He saw Lord followers. He was thankful for

Grace given, enrichment experienced, and spiritual gifts abounding. Can we together imagine that?

We also accomplished some business at our retreat:

- Election of Sr. Warden and Junior Warden
- Assignment of commissions
- Approval of an operating budget for 2017.

God is blessing us at The Church of the Redeemer. God is blessing us so that we might draw closer to him and through that be the church that we are imagining this morning, the group of people that he desires to be. 2107 will be a great year!

Amen