

### 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (EHV)

**In fact, although I am free from all, I enslaved myself to all so that I might gain many more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews, I became like a Jew so that I might gain Jews. To those who are under the law, I became like a person under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those who are without the law, I became like a person without the law (though I am not without God’s law but am within the law of Christ) so that I might gain those who are without the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak, I became weak so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people so that I may save at least some. <sup>23</sup> And I do everything for the sake of the gospel so that I may share in it along with others.**

Dear Children of God,

A couple of years ago I remember reading about a man in Michigan who walks twenty one miles to work each day. He had been doing this ever since his car broke down ten years. He works at a job that pays \$10.55 per hour. We admire this man’s determination to stick with his job even if it means walking twenty one miles per day. As much as we admire this man’s determination, we admire even more the determination of the great missionary the Apostle Paul. He was willing to do whatever was necessary to preach the good news about Jesus to people who will spend eternity in hell without their Savior.

We just heard these words, **“I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save at least some.”** More determination, that’s what I want in my life and I know you want it your life as well. We want to become even more determined to bring the gospel to people as Paul was. We want this for ourselves and we want this for our congregation. So with Paul’s words ringing in our ears we will seek to answer the question:

#### **Sermon Theme: How Do We Become All things To All People?**

- 1. By God calling us to faith by the Gospel**
- 2. By God’s Gospel empowering us to share the Gospel**

The Apostle Paul tells us he was compelled by the gospel to proclaim the message of the gospel to as many people as possible, **“I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about, because an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16)** So we ask Paul, “Paul, what makes you tick?” “What is the driving force in your life?” Without even thinking he says emphatically, “The Gospel! The Gospel! The Gospel!” The message of the Gospel is the driving force in our lives because it is so radically different from any other religion in the world.

Paul was determined to proclaim the gospel because the good news of Jesus Christ his Savior delivered him when he was lost in sin. Paul knew how enslaved he once was to the belief that keeping Old Testament laws and the extra rules and regulations of Jewish religion could save him from his sin and give him a good place in heaven. In chapter three of Philippians he says, **“If anyone else thinks that he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people**

**of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.” (Philippians 3:4-6)**

I wonder if Paul ever had a day in his life, after he came to faith, when he did not think about how blind he was and hopelessly lost in a false religious system, but then the gospel came into his life and God changed his heart. The man who hated the name of Jesus now loved it. His eyes were opened to see that he was not saved by his own deeds of righteousness which fell short of God’s glory. Instead his eyes saw Jesus as the source of his righteousness and peace with God and forgiveness of sin.

Here is what he says also in chapter three of Philippians: **“whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. 8 But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ.” (Philp. 3:7-8)** How could he not take what been given to him by God’s grace and proclaim it to other people?

Paul did not choose to preach the gospel. It was Jesus who chose him for that purpose. **“If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward;(Y) if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.” (1 Cor. 9:17 – NIV)** If Paul chose to preach the gospel, then he says he deserves to be rewarded for making that choice. But because he was chosen by Christ, he was simply carrying out what needed to be done. We are determined to bring the gospel to people as Paul was because we know the time is short. Life is short, but the work before us is great and wonderful.

## **2. God’s Gospel Empowers Us to Share the Gospel**

If life is short and by God’s grace he has called us to faith, what is our purpose or work while we are on this earth after he has called us to faith? It isn’t to eat drink and be merry. It isn’t to sit back and observe this wonderful world God has put around us. It is to Become all things to all people as we share the Gospel. But what does it mean **“to become all things to all people?”** Perhaps it’s easier to start with what it’s not. It’s not changing the message of Gods’ saving truths found in the Bible. It’s not in any way compromising the truth of God’s Word to make more people happy. It does mean adapting the ways we share the Gospel so that it is appropriate for the audience.

Paul put it this way: **“To the Jews, I became like a Jew so that I might gain Jews. To those who are under the law, I became like a person under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those who are under the law. To those who are without the law, I became like a person without the law (though I am not without God’s law but am within the law of Christ) so that I might gain those who are without the law.** Paul was no longer a Jewish believer. He was not bound by the ceremonial laws that governed the Jewish people’s daily lives because he knew that those laws had been fulfilled in Jesus. But when he went to the Jewish people, he didn’t go and offer them pork chops and see if they wanted to do some work on Saturday. No, among the Jewish people, he subjected himself back under the law so that from that vantage point, he could show them their freedom in Jesus.

Likewise, to the non-Jewish people, the Gentiles, Paul did not come with a strict diet of laws and regulations that he demanded the people follow. He did not come angry and laughing at their sinful ignorance, but rather came with God’s Word to show them their Savior, and just how dearly they needed

that Savior. He didn't change God's Word. He didn't change God's definition of right and wrong. He didn't change that core, unshakable truth of the complete forgiveness in Jesus, but he adapted his methods to communicate that rock-solid message to different people.

How do we do that? How do we adapt? We start by looking at ourselves. We start by letting God's Word address us where we are. We need to hear that message of sin and grace, law and gospel. We need to hear just how horrendous we are. We need to hear, like all people do, how we have violated God's law time and time again. We don't deserve any good from God. We deserve for him to throw us in hell, but God changed that. In fact, in the most amazing way, Jesus became all things for us. He became the one thing that he wasn't: sin. Paul would write later to the Corinthians: **“God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)**. Jesus bent over backwards to become what we really need as he became our sin, died our death, and suffered our hell.

And it's that very message that we get to carry to the world. It's that message whether through a private conversation or the work of the ministries that you support with your prayers and offerings, that we work together to spread! We can adapt our methods to meet people where they were because we were all there. We were all lost in sin and have been plucked from the fire of punishment by our Savior.

But where do start? How do we begin? We've been studying friendship evangelism in our Sunday morning Bible classes. Sharing your faith can be scary, but you are the best ambassadors for our congregation, and ultimately for our Savior. You can live your lives in a way that glorifies God and then be ready to tell people what you believe, and perhaps even invite people to join us in worship or Bible class so that they, too, can learn about God's eternal love for them.

We just had our Voters' Meeting last Tuesday. There we got updates on what is going on in our congregation's ministry and some of the ministries we are a part of and we made some plans for the ministry moving forward. This vital part of our congregation's work is of great importance. What are we going to do? How are we going to do it? And in what ways can you help as part of our joint work? It reminded those who were there what our mission here at St. John is.

Our mission is to teach and share God's Word, that message of the cross and of sins forgiven in Jesus. This message is more important than any opinion or feeling that you or I might harbor. But we need to find the best ways to deliver this message. We need to look at our surroundings and who we are preaching to. When Paul found himself in the synagogue, he adapted his methods of proclaiming that gospel. When he found himself surrounded by the idols of Athens, he adapted his methods of proclaiming that gospel. Even though it didn't always work, he said his goal was that he may save at least some. Not everyone listened and not everyone is going to listen to us. But we need to look around us, our area here in the Fox Valley, our resources here in our congregation and our synod, and ask, “How might we become all things to all people? How might we tailor our ministry of proclaiming that gospel to those around us? Does that mean a reviewing what we are presently doing? Yes! Does this mean encouraging each other as we do God's mission work going forward into the future? Yes!

Whatever we do, whatever decisions are made, whatever the plans we lay out, it is God that is going to determine the blessings that come from them, and it is God that is going to work through us to accomplish his purpose. It is God who is going to strengthen our hearts and minds in the forgiving love of Jesus. Let us become all things to all people so we can show all people that God became all things for them so that some might be saved. Amen.