

**<sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are ministers through whom you believed, and each served as the Lord gave him his role. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. <sup>7</sup> So then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but it is God who causes the growth. <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters are united, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For God is the one whom we serve as coworkers, and you are God's field, God's building.**

**<sup>10</sup> In keeping with the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. But let each person be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> In fact, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. (EHV)**

Theme: God: The Grower and Builder of our Faith

1. By Grace he works through his ministers
2. By Grace he creates faith in our hearts

We all have our favorites. It is natural for us to like, and thus support, certain things—a car company, a sports team, TV show, movie, type of music—the list goes on and on. Often, we have good reasons for liking and supporting the things we do, other times we don't—we simply like certain things because we like them, we can't really explain it. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with liking and supporting such things.

Of course, we have to be careful with such things as well. For instance, you aren't supposed to like one of your children more than another! What about Pastors? Again, it's perfectly natural to have favorites; yet we must be careful because having favorites could lead to factions; that is the situation Paul was dealing with in our text for today.

The Corinthian congregation was founded by Paul during his second Missionary Journey. Paul had stayed in the city of Corinth for a year and a half, the longest of all his stints in one particular city besides Ephesus. It was a wise choice by Paul—as the capital city of the Roman Province of Achaia it had a population of over 200,000. Acts 18 tells us that during his time in Corinth, every Sabbath he would go into the Synagogue to tell the Jews about Christ before he would share the gospel with the Gentiles.

Eventually Paul had to move on to continue his missionary journeys. It wasn't longer, however, before problems arose in the Corinthian congregation.

One of the problems was that there were factions in the congregation because some preferred Paul while others supported a man named Apollos. We meet Apollos in Acts 18 when he was in Ephesus. He was a Jew who was zealous for Jesus, but a bit misguided. After learning more from husband-and-wife team, Aquila and Priscilla, companions of Paul, he eventually made his way over to Achaia and apparently became the Pastor in Corinth.

Some preferred Paul, who founded the congregation, or “planted the seed;” but others preferred Apollos who built upon Paul's work, or “watered the seed.” The two sides must have been hostile toward each other, because factions arose from all the infighting within in the congregation. I'm sure it undermined Apollos' ministry at times; and certainly hindered the spread of the gospel in Corinth.

Not that this is happening here at St. John; I haven't seen any evidence that it is that there is any fighting between Team Frey and Team Gartner or Team Suhr or Team Martin. Although, I have seen it at other WELS congregations, and it does great damage to the gospel ministry. So, if this

isn't an issue here at St. John, why am I talking about this portion of Scripture for my final sermon? Because of the way Paul describes Pastors and God as he dealt with this situation! It's all too easy for us to put too much emphasis on the man who is our pastor, to focus too much on the individual—thinking that the gospel ministry is about him, or depends on him and his work. And when things go well, we give him the credit; and when things aren't going well, we blame him.

So it's good to see how Paul dealt with this problem within his former congregation when they were putting too much emphasis on the man who was leading them. He says in verse seven, **neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything.** Nothing. Neither Paul nor Apollos were anything, at least not anything compared to the Lord. Who was better, more important, right or wrong? It didn't really matter to Paul, because neither he nor Apollos really mattered compared God and his Word.

Why is that? In verse five Paul refers to himself and Apollos as ministers, or servants. A minister is one who serves, in this context they serve the Lord—they do his bidding. And they serve others by serving them with the gospel. Servants aren't above their master. No one cares more about the servant than the master or pays any attention to the master's servants whatsoever. A good servant does about what is asked of him without calling any attention to himself. So pastors aren't free to do whatever they want—they are servants of the Lord and answerable to him for what they do and don't do; and they must be careful about what they say and do.

Together Paul and Apollos were servants, they were on the same team—just like your pastors, whoever they may be! There never should have been any “Team Paul” or “Team Apollos” or “Team Frey, Gartner, etc.” For they are all on the same team, the same side—servants of the Lord God through whom he graciously works. And so we do well not to focus on the man, not to focus on the earthly instrument the Lord uses, but on the master, God himself. That's why Paul writes in 2 Corinthians—and I pray that I've followed his example here at St. John, **we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.**

In verses six and seven Paul writes, **I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but it is God who causes the growth.** Paul planted the seed of faith as the founder of the congregation; Apollos, as the Pastor after Paul, watered the seed, but neither of them are anything.

Why? Because God caused that seed to grow! God is the one who brought the Corinthians to faith. God is the one who shined the light of the gospel on their sin-darkened hearts; he is the one who welcomed them into his family through the gospel—the Word and Baptism and kept them in that one true faith through the same Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion. God is the one who welcomed all believers to his heavenly home when they died in faith. The Lord is the one who does all the real work, without which there would be no Church. God is the one who caused the growth; Paul and Apollos—and every other pastor, are simply instruments through which God brings people to faith.

The Pastor, whether Paul or Apollos, or Frey or Gartner, or Pastor “So-and-so,” or Pastor “First Name” doesn't have any special power or ability to bring someone to faith or grow their faith. All they can do is preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but they can't add to the power or effectiveness of the gospel because the power behind the means of grace lies with the Lord. So once again, the Pastor is nothing, God is everything.

Paul didn't die on the cross; Apollos didn't rise from the dead. Gartner didn't bring you to faith, Frey didn't strengthen your faith. No human did anything, they aren't anything. Christ is everything, he paid for your sins by shedding his innocent blood on the cross, he suffered your eternal condemnation, he lived a perfect life which he gave to you, he defeated death and

promises you eternal life through faith in him. So we focus on Christ, his grace, and his power to save us, not on any mere man.

Shortly after I got here, just over 4 years ago, I was going through the cabinets in my office and came across a framed artwork among some others, and I instantly recognized it as one of Martin Luther's sacristy prayers. So I hung it up in the sacristy, the room behind me, where the Pastors get ready for the worship service. And I've tried to conduct myself in the same manner as Luther in the following prayer, which I'll share with you in a slightly different translation than what is behind me: *"Lord God, you have made me a pastor in your church. You see how unfit I am to undertake this great and difficult office, and if it were not for your help, I would have ruined it all long ago. Therefore I cry to you for aid. I offer my mouth and my heart to your service. I desire to teach the people. And for myself, I would learn evermore and diligently meditate on your Word. Use me as your instrument, but never forsake me, for if I am left alone, I shall easily bring it all to destruction. Amen."*

Did you notice what Luther says about himself—that he is unfit for the pastoral office, that if the Lord did not help him he would have ruined the gospel ministry long ago, and left to himself he would bring it all to destruction. If that's what Luther, the Great Reformer, says about himself, and Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, says that he and Apollos aren't anything—then what am I? Nothing. God is everything. And so, like Paul, I strived to always preach Christ to you. As he writes in 1 Corinthians 2, **For I had no intention of knowing anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.**

In verses nine and ten, Paul makes a few common pictures in Scripture about the Church. He says that you are God's field. The field is ripe for harvest, Pastors are workers in the harvest field, but the Lord is owner of the field. He also says that you are God's building. Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone—the main and most important stone of the foundation of the Church. Without Christ the Church does not stand, but it crumbles and falls. Christ is the cornerstone, and the prophets and Apostles are the foundation through the Gospel they preach. Paul writes in Ephesians 2, **You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone.** You are a brick in the building that is the Church and your pastors are simply another brick of the same building, the Holy Christian Church.

So once again, the Pastor isn't free to do or preach whatever he wants. He must be careful what he does. He builds on the foundation of Christ, not on his own talents, abilities, personality, or whatever. The foundation of the Church was not Paul or Apollos anymore than I am the foundation of St. John! Putting the foundation on any man is like building a foundation on sand—it shifts, it changes, it dies, it moves away. But Christ is the rock-solid, eternal cornerstone.

So, God is the one who grows the field of his Church, and he is the one who builds the building of his Church, with he himself is the foundation. If God is the builder and its own foundation, then you know that the Church cannot fall, it will stand forever! God has promised to watch over his Church—to guard and protect it, to grow and build it through the gospel, no matter who his sharing it! A building is only as good as it's foundation, and our foundation is flawless—true God and true man, who grows and builds his Church through those who aren't anything! So we focus on our Savior, our grower, and our builder; for in him the Church stands forever.

You know this—after four-plus years, you know full-well that I am nothing; and yet you're hear listening to me right now? Well, you're not here to listen to me, but to the Lord. For I am nothing and God is everything. I marvel that the Lord would entrust me, a sinful jar of clay, with some so precious as his gospel! And if the Lord could work though a nobody like me, then he can work through anyone! And he does and has—he worked through Paul and Apollos, through Suhr, Martin, and Gartner, and he'll work through his next servant here at St. John. He will continue giving power to his gospel and build up his Church, until we stand side by side singing his praises forever. Amen.