

Altadena Valley Presbyterian Church
December 31st 2017
Morning Worship/ the Lord's Supper

Text: I Corinthians 15:58

Theme: Paul's admonition to the Corinthians to be steadfast, immovable and abounding in the work of the Lord. He issued this admonition in light of the victory of our Lord over death and sin. Because death has been overcome and Christ rose victorious over it by his resurrection, that same resurrection power is ours even in the present moment. It is the power that enables us to be what we could not be in ourselves.

Title: 2018 Pilgrimage

Introduction:

1. One way we conceive of our identity as God's people is that of a sojourner (1 Peter 2:11). It points to the idea that we are on a journey.
2. In less than 24 hours, we will commence our journey into 2018. You look back to 2017, and you may have had your share of triumphs and successes. Some of you may have had your share of setbacks, disappointments, discouragements, and even a sense of failure to the point of giving up.
3. You may want to forget 2017 and look forward to 2018. But how do we face 2018 with all the challenges and the unknowns we might have to face. To answer the question, I would like for us to take a look at Paul's admonition found in I Corinthians 15.58 and see if we find encouragement as we face 2018.

Transition: Before we get into it, it would be well by way of a reminder to take note of the context of this verse. As you can see, it is right here in chapter 15 where Paul expounds this concept of the resurrection of the dead.

4. You recall in your reading of I Corinthians the many problems Paul addressed in that church.
 - * There was a divisive spirit- "I follow Paul, I follow Peter, I follow Apollos"
 - * The issue of immorality in chapter 5
 - * Questions about marriage in chapter 7
 - * Issue about believers suing one another
 - * The issue of gifts that became a cause for a prideful attitude
 - * I do not intend to provide a list of all the problems just to say that Paul dealt with many questions in that church

5. Apparently, in addition to all the issues, some denied the idea of the resurrection of the body. The influence may have come from this pagan idea of the immortality of the soul. Their denial is related to their behavior as Paul implies in verses 32-34, as if to ~~imply~~^{say} that, what they do in the body doesn't matter anymore.

6. But Paul in his typical pastoral way of dealing with the issues, marshals his argument to highlight the idea that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. To deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

7. Now, without belaboring the points raised in this chapter, I want to highlight the basic themes in this chapter.

* Verses 1-11 reaffirm the facts of the Christian faith regarding the Gospel and the resurrection of Christ. And notice how Paul is not some kind of an innovator but merely repeats what he received. Verses 3-4, **“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”**

* In verses 12 to 34, he makes the case for the resurrection of the dead.

* In verses 35- 49, Paul outlines his points about how the body will be resurrected.

* And finally, in 50 to 58, Paul presents a concluding note of victory and admonition in light of that victory.

* That victory proclaims that Christ has overcome sin and death. Paul alludes to a text from the OT (Hosea 13:14) and says, **“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”** Paul answers these questions. The first question is answered, in verse 57. The second question is answered in verse 56, **“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”**

* Death appears to have the upper hand. It dominates human kind. It touches all of us with its sting. And it has been that way ever since sin was introduced into God's creation by our first parents. And Paul says in Romans 7, **“I did not know what sin was until the law came.”** Just like for Paul and the rest of us, the law revealed or demonstrated the power of sin in our hearts. But look at the answer given to the first question, O death, where is your victory? We read in verse 57, **“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”**

8. That is an awesome answer! But here is the follow up question, how do we appropriate this victory? How do we know that this victory is true? We appropriate this by faith. By faith we believe and accept this is true, spiritually speaking. That is to say that this is spiritual reality.

9. Several passages of Paul would point out that this language of the resurrection is also a present reality.

We read in Ephesians 2:4-6, **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”** In the same book, Paul writes in the first chapter verse 19 that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is in us who believe.

In addition, we can cite Colossians 2:12-13, **“...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”**

10. There are other passages that speak to this idea that this resurrection of believers is a present reality. What this means is that by virtue of your union with Christ, his death is your death, his resurrection is your resurrection. And because of that possession, brothers and sisters in Christ, you now have a piece of the future. It is now a present reality. And this present reality is not just a figure of speech, it is, brothers and sisters in Christ, a spiritual reality.

If you are a believer, in the inner core of your being, this is true of you. You have been raised up with Christ. You have the present reality of the resurrection.

11. It is for this reason that this positive admonition given in verse 58 is such a powerful encouragement.

I. In the first part Paul says, **“Therefore be steadfast, immovable...”**

A. It is always good to ask, what is the “therefore” there for? It goes back to the whole chapter. The fact that Paul had to remind them of the Gospel in the beginning part of this chapter suggests perhaps that they were tempted to stray from it. Paul gives them the imperative. He tells them, from now on, “be and remain steadfast.”

B. The word in the original for steadfast is “sitting” like as if seated, firm, and solid. The other word here is immovable. The obvious meaning is that you are not shifting. In chapter 16.13 Paul reminds them again and says, **“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”**

C. To be steadfast is to stay the course. It is to have an attitude of stick-to-it-tiveness.

You may have moments of insanity when the pressures of life, the temptation of the flesh, and of the world come knocking on your doorstep and whisper, “Hey, I am here. Let the good times

roll.” What will you do? Would you be steadfast and stick to your integrity and keep on keeping on or give up?

For all of us, we do not have an idea what 2018 may bring us. It may be more disappointments, more setbacks, discouragements and even physical suffering. We have no way of knowing what will take place.

And you try to do everything right, but it doesn't go your way. You put everything in order so you are prepared. You get there and all your plans get rejected. You begin to wonder. What is wrong with me. You face many obstacles and soon the obstacles feel like a brick wall in front of you and you are just bouncing against the wall. **Do you ever feel that way with life sometimes?**

In the book of Job chapter 2 after tragedy struck him, his wife tells him, **“Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die.”** Give it up Job, it is not worth it. But Job remained steadfast. He endured to the end. At one point he even said, **“Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.”** Now that is faith on the part of Job!

But what was it that enabled Paul to be steadfast and immovable?

In 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 Paul writes, **“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”**

In the same book in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 Paul writes, **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”** Paul also says in this chapter verse 16, **“So we do not lose heart.”**

What is this power Paul referred to in this chapter? It is not political power. It is not athletic power, not even mental power. This is spiritual power appropriated by faith in the resurrected Christ our Lord. **This is spiritual power that allows us to be what we could not be in ourselves.**

This is a power that allows us to love and care for people. This is a power that gives us the ability to be patient, kind, gentle, and humble before one another. This is a power that allows us to be remade in God's image, conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a power that allows us to carry on the Lord's work even though at times it looks unpromising.

This is a power that gives us a sense of quiet confidence, because we know in our hearts, it does not depend on us but on God who gives us the ability to be what we could not be in ourselves. This is you see, the Holy Spirit's power dwelling and living in us; if that is true, moral reformation and the formation of Christ in our hearts become a reality. In other words, we can truly change.

You see, this is what allowed Paul to write and say, **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."** It is what allowed him to be content in want or in plenty- in whatever circumstance he found himself in. That strength is also available to you. The Spirit's power appropriated by faith is what will give you strength to face whatever comes your way.

You and I have heard in this fellowship the sense of brokenness of this world. That brokenness has touched our lives as well in some form or another. The good news is that the mercy and favor of God's love appeared. He has come to redeem us, rescue us, and dwell in us and with us. God, in other words, continue to sustain us by his power through the presence of his Holy Spirit.

You see, what will allow us to be steadfast and immovable despite discouragements in ministry, setbacks, disappointments, psychological and physical suffering is faith in the resurrecting power of God in Christ. That power is in us who believe. It is the power of the resurrected Christ living in and through us. When you think about it, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the presence of the resurrected Christ living and dwelling in us.

You and I often imagine that the Apostle Paul is unlike us. So we think of him as a super-apostle. But if we understand him right, his life is also our biography so that his confidence is also our confidence. His boldness is also our boldness because his trust, his faith is in the same God, the same Lord Jesus you and I believe in.

And it is for this reason that we can be steadfast and immovable. We do not have to succumb to every wind of change to move us around because we have an anchor sure and firm in the resurrected Lord.

II. Secondly, we find in this admonition the admonition to abound in the work of the Lord.

A. Notice the reason attached to that admonition. It says, "always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." What is the work of the Lord?

1. Early on in this book, Paul pointed out that he is a fellow worker along with Peter and Apollos. He claimed in chapter 3 that he was, along with Peter and Apollos, **"Servants through whom you believe."** He goes on to say that his role was that of a planter and that Apollos

watered and God gave the increase. The work Paul engaged in is spiritual in nature. It is spiritual work involving the preaching, and teaching the Good News of the Gospel as pointed out by Paul in what he did. He delivered the Gospel to them.

2. Often, the results are imperceptible to our eyes. We cannot measure the faith, the love and the spiritual growth of God's people and yet God is at work. He is on the march accomplishing his will and purpose in the lives of his people.

3. In chapter 12 of I Corinthians Paul outlines how the giftedness of the Lord's people work together for the common good.

Beginning in verse 4 he says, **"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."** In verse 11 he writes, **"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."**

If we are to fulfill the admonition to abound in the work of the Lord, it would mean that we will have to exercise our giftedness for the common good. It is a two way street.

On the one hand, we affirm our gifts God gave us. On the other hand, we appreciate the gifts that others have in their ministry to us. For example, I have an appreciation for people who are gifted musically. For the life of me, I cannot carry a tune. But I like listening, especially to a musical piece done well. The music program of this church is just awesome! Thanks to its leader Steve Whitner.

3. And so, Paul gives his admonition to abound in the work of the Lord. In light of the victory brought by the Lord Jesus in his resurrection, we certainly can abound in the work of the Lord.

4. But notice the reason given why we are to abound in the work of the Lord. It says, **"Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."** Earlier in this chapter in verse 14, Paul mentioned the vanity of our faith if Christ has not been resurrected. Indeed, it would be useless to expend effort if Christ has not been resurrected. That would mean he is dead and not alive. And Paul says that we would be a sorry bunch of people, if Christ has not been resurrected.

5. Because Christ is alive, that means he knows what we are doing. In other words, the Lord knows his people. He has his eye upon them. In Hebrews chapter 6:10, we read, **"For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do."** In other words, the Lord remembers your labor of love both for him and for the church. (Nehemiah 13:14) "Remember me."

6. Earlier, I mentioned that the denial of the resurrection may have led some people in Corinth to think that what they do in the body no longer matters. The fact is, what we do in the flesh matters in God's eyes. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "**For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.**" What Paul highlights is that what we do in this world is significant. The work is not worthless. The work is not useless; never futile. So we are to abound in the work of the Lord.

7. I have been speaking implying that the work of the Lord somehow is limited to the church. One of the great outcomes of the Reformation was the perspective it gave to this idea of vocation. Each one here has a calling from God. It may be in the church. It may be outside the church. Every calling is valid. Whatever that calling maybe, the Lord has placed you there so you can carry his work in that calling. For sure, you are placed there as a witness of God's grace and mercy in your life.

8. What this means for all of us is that we have work to do as we face 2018. I began this morning by considering with you I Cor. 15:58 and see what encouragement we may glean from it as we journey into 2018. We do not know what lies ahead. We have no idea what will happen in 2018.

But whatever may come let us keep I Cor. 15:58 in the forefront of our minds. Let us be reminded constantly that our faith rests upon the resurrected Christ, who now lives and dwells within us all.

May God give us the holy energy we all need to respond to this admonition of being steadfast, immovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Amen.

Father in heaven we thank you for the life
your Son our Lord Jesus has begun in all of
us. We pray that you will give ~~me~~ us the holy
energy we all need to respond to your admonition
of being steadfast, immovable & always abounding
in your work of the Lord -