

Grace, mercy, and peace by yours this day in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The title for today’s sermon is “All Things to All People”, and is based on the Epistle reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Let us pray... Amen.

Have you ever been asked to do something outside of your comfort zone? Maybe at work, at home, with friends, something entirely legal, but something you did not feel comfortable doing? You can see it, perhaps, with children who before they are able to walk are more than a little bit wobbly. But how about for us as parents, who when we bring home a new-born child. Did you feel like you were sent home with a package you were not qualified to bring home? I know I was. But it happens elsewhere in life too, when we are asked to do things and we don’t have the expertise or experience to accomplish it.

But then we turn to today’s reading and look at St. Paul and at times I am impressed and even envious of him. Paul was sent out by God to proclaim God’s Word to the nations. He went all over the known world, being sent from Antioch and ending up in Rome, proclaiming the Gospel to people that the world would know Christ. The church expanded exponentially through his preaching, teaching, and writings, by the power of God working through the proclaimed Gospel.

True, Paul had some challenges, but they can be easily overlooked when one sees all that was accomplished through him.

Paul’s calling, his vocation given him by God was *to be all things to all people*. Occasionally we get to see someone like that in our own life, one who seems like they too can be all things to all people. I remember our sainted sister Doris Putland. She only had 14 kids, but still had time to invite her (12) siblings and their families over on Sundays and fed them, while helping out where she was needed.

But going back to Paul and seeing the amazing things accomplished through him, we also need to notice just a chapter later when he also calls us **to be imitators of him as he is of Christ**(1 Corinthians 11:1) At this point Paul’s words make me feel rather uncomfortable: “**All thing to all people**”. We are called to be all things to everyone around us. When I look at my own life, I don’t see the results, and if the truth be told, it is because I don’t see the same effort.

But we aren’t just called to imitate Paul, we are called to imitate Jesus! Paul had problems in his life: he was rejected by those he was sent to. Many people did not like him even though he spoke the truth to them. Paul was attacked verbally and physically. He was arrested, imprisoned, and severely beat for preaching the truth; trying to be “**all things to all people**”. Yet we are still called to imitate Christ, no matter the cost or threat.

But we are not just called to follow Paul, we are called to imitate Jesus. Jesus didn’t just get attacked with words or beaten; He was crucified for each and every one of us! This seems like a huge, crushing, and unrealistic demand for me. How about for you?

Still we are called to follow where Jesus leads as we see Paul doing.

But then, as I read what Paul says, he wasn't just called to be all things to all people; he wasn't called to be a short order cook and a tent maker, he was called to be all things to all people for the distinct purpose that, that by all means I save some”(1 Cor. 9:22b)

Paul's mission and his missionary status was not about Paul, about his prestige, his semi rock star status, or for his personal gain: It was about saving souls for Christ. It was about being God's servant in Christ to a people who did and didn't know their Saviour.

Paul's mission was to proclaim the Gospel that through hearing it people would come to believe: that they would be given the gift of faith and they too would be able to rejoice in the Gospel promises proclaimed. Paul tried to be all things to all people, to do whatever he could in his life to reach out to those to whom he was sent, that some would be saved. He was all things to all people: a Jew to the Jews, as one under the Law to those under the Law, as one not under the Law to those not under the Law, and even in weakness to the weak. Paul proclaimed in our reading “**I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.**”(22b-23) He went and shared the Gospel.

But what is the Gospel? Simply: “**Christ and Him crucified**”(1 Cor. 2:2) and you can add two words to it: “for you.” Christ and Him crucified is the message Paul proclaimed. Paul didn't go out and assume people would get to know the Gospel by His actions; He proclaimed it for all to hear. While his actions were very important, without speaking and sharing the Gospel, the reason for his actions would have been silent. Paul proclaimed Christ's Gospel to all who would hear for he knew faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). He modeled His life around the Gospel and for its proclamation.

‘To follow the crucified Messiah meant that Paul had to take up his cross daily, die to self-interest, and serve the One who bought him. One cannot properly promote the gospel any other way. To promote it this way—by dying to one's own self-interest, giving up all insistence upon the sacredness of one's rights, and striving to win as many as possible—is to follow Christ crucified, the One who died, literally, to *his* self-interest, gave up all insistence upon the sacredness of *his* very real rights, and set himself to win men and women from every people and tongue and tribe and nation. There is no other way of following Christ; there is no other way of sharing in the gospel's blessings than by proclaiming it.’(D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 135-36; as found in Lockwood's, *1 Corinthians*, CPH, 315)

While Paul was willing to be anything to reach out and save people, he was not willing to change the Gospel. Christ and Him crucified for you. Christ who truly became all things for all people; Christ who became your sin so you could have His life; Christ who took death, and died it for you, that even in your death you would not die eternally but share in His eternal life; Christ who shed His blood for you, whose body was broken for you and for the whole world that

through Him the world—all people—may be healed and saved. Christ, God in the flesh, came, lived, and died for you, for me, and for each and every person in order to save us.

This same Christ who died also rose from the dead for your salvation. He comes to you, finds you, and makes you His own through His Word and Sacrament. He brings all His gifts He earned for you, to you that you may be His own. He gives you His life, His comfort, His peace, things the world cannot give.

Jesus proclaims you to be His own as He washed you and covers you with His grace by water and the Word in Holy Baptism.

Jesus continues come to you and to proclaim His Gospel to you to fresh and strengthen your faith and trust in His saving work for you and His continued presence with you every day.

Jesus will feed you again today with His own body and blood, broken and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins, to heal you, and give you the strength to live another week in this fallen world.

The Gospel: Christ and Him crucified for you are the sweetest words you will ever hear, because in those words you and I need to keep hearing because they are God’s comfort, His peace, and our salvation. You have been bought and redeemed from your sins, from the devil, and from death. The Gospel was the power of God for the salvation of the world 2000 years ago, and it continues to be the power of God for the salvation of the world today.

The Gospel is God's gift to Paul and to each and every Christian to hear and to share for the salvation of us sinners.

Now, you and I, we don’t have to personally go out and proclaim the Gospel around the world to all nation. Instead, God has placed us here in our vocations as father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, grandmother, grandfather, cousin, friend, and neighbour. God has placed us here in this SE corner of Saskatchewan, in these communities, in our families, and amongst our neighbours to share His Gospel for their salvation. We have the God given privilege, and command, to share His Gospel with those around us that they too might be saved. Together we can share in all the blessings of Christ. So let us run through this life with the endurance the Holy Spirit has given you knowing we are saved by grace through faith and our salvation was accomplish for us by Christ on the cross. Share God’s free grace—the Gospel—with those around you that together we may rest eternally in the salvation prepared for us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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