

The First Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 3, 2017

1 Corinthians 1:7-8, **"...you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Dear Christians,

I want to extend a warm welcome to our I&I guests this year—especially since circumstances prevented us from hosting the tournament last year. We are so happy to have the tournament back and so happy to have you here to be part of it.

You may be good. You may be gifted. But you're not perfect. That's true of everybody. That's even true of basketball players and basketball teams. Steph Curry is probably one of the greatest point guards to ever play the game. He's a gifted athlete. But he's not perfect. Steph, over his career, has made 44% of the 3-point shots he has taken. Now, that's a great percentage. But think about it, he still misses more three-pointers than he makes. His lifetime field goal percentage is presently 48%--again great, but not perfect. Over the years from the charity stripe Steph has made an average of 89% of his free throws--outstanding, but not perfect.

If my memory serves me right, I was told that Immanuel, Seymour's team that's here again this weekend is shooting 40% from the 3-point line and 50% overall. That's great, but that's not perfect. The young man from Zion, New Palestine who won the free throw competition yesterday shot 9 out of 12--75%. Nothing to scoff at, but it's not perfect. If any of you Lutheran school students performed that same way in the classroom you would be failing school. 44% on my math test. Nailed it! Passed 50% of my classes. Awesome job!

The church in the ancient city of Corinth was a gifted bunch of believers. Paul says, **"...in every way you were enriched in Him (in Jesus) in all speech and knowledge."** Again St. Paul writes, **"...you are not lacking in any gift."** God had poured out His grace and His Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit on the Church in Corinth.

But they were not perfect. In fact, there were big problems in the Church in Corinth. That's why the Paul wrote this Epistle to the Corinthians. In his letter Paul addressed some of the problems going on in the Church in Corinth. The Corinthian believers were gifted by God—but they abused God's gifts and used them in selfish and loveless ways, not to build up the Church but to build up themselves.

The church in Corinth was divided—some followed Paul, others Peter, still others Apollos rather than Christ. Now that they had become "spiritual" they didn't think it mattered what they did with their bodies. And so, they engaged in all kinds of sexual immorality. In fact, it was so bad that a man was having sexual relations with his stepmother. Worse yet, the Church had no problem with it! They were treating the Lord's Supper as though it was nothing more than plain old bread and wine rather than a participation in the body and blood of Jesus.

The Corinthians had questions about whether or not believers should remain married to unbelievers. Questions about whether or not they should eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Questions about the role of women in the public worship of the Church. Questions about whether the resurrection of the dead was real or not.

Yes, the Church in Corinth was imperfect. The Christians in Corinth were imperfect. Thank the Lord the congregations represented at this I&I Tournament are not like the Church in Corinth! Thank goodness our congregations and their members are perfect. Thank God we don't struggle with problems and challenges of any kind in our congregations and in our families. Right!

We're in the same boat as those Corinthians. We have good congregations. We have congregations and members that have been enriched in Jesus in all speech and knowledge; congregations and members in whom the testimony about Jesus has been confirmed; congregations and individual believers who have received the gift of God's Spirit and the gifts of God's Spirit. But we are not perfect, not one of us.

I know what Trinity Danville's strengths and weaknesses are. You know what the strengths and weaknesses are at your congregation. I know the questions that are being asked in this place and the problems we are struggling with as a congregation and as individual believers. You know the questions that are being asked where you come from and the problems you are struggling with as a congregation and as individual believers.

The problem with the Church in Corinth; the problem with the Church in Danville and Mattoon and Indy and Seymour and Rochelle and New Palestine; the problem with every Christian congregation in every community is that we are made up of a bunch of imperfect sinners. Sinners who can't seem to help themselves. Sinners whose sinful nature often gets the best of them. Sinners who at times insist on rebelling against God's Word and will and running roughshod over the very neighbors that we are called and commanded by God to love and serve.

The dilemma we face is that the Last Day is coming, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't know when it's coming; we only know that it's coming—that day when Jesus will be revealed; that day when Jesus will judge you and me and every sinner.

And the fact is, God is not satisfied with sinners who only obey Him and His Word 44% of the time. God is not satisfied with sinners who love their neighbor 50% of the time. God is not even satisfied with sinners who do His will and walk in His Commandments 89% of the time. Jesus says, **“Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** The prophet Isaiah testifies, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”** It would seem that all is lost; that we are lost.

And yet, what does St. Paul call this imperfect congregation made up of imperfect sinners in Corinth? How does he address them at the beginning of his letter?

“To the Church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place (like Danville, Mattoon, Indy, Rochelle, New Palestine, and Seymour) call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul calls imperfect congregations, like ours, and imperfect sinners, like us, **“the Church of God.”** Paul says that our imperfect congregations and their imperfect members have been sanctified—made holy—in Christ Jesus. Paul asserts that we who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ are **“saints”**—holy people.

How is that possible? It’s possible because Jesus was and is not only good, and great, and gifted. Jesus was and is perfect. But He wasn’t perfect for His own sake. He was perfect for your sake. He didn’t keep the Ten Commandments 100% to earn His own salvation, but to earn your salvation. He didn’t obey God 100% so that He would be pleasing to the Father, but so that you and I, imperfect sinners, unholy people, breakers of God’s Law, would be pleasing to the Father.

Not only that, Jesus, the perfect One, took your imperfections to the cross. Jesus, the holy One, suffered for you whose thoughts and words and deeds are often less than holy. Jesus, the Keeper of God’s Law, died for your laundry list of offenses against God’s Law. Jesus the guiltless One was condemned and declared guilty of your sin so that you, the guilty one, could be forgiven and declared guiltless of all sin.

And what does St. Paul promise to us imperfect sinners; to us who have heard and believed the testimony that Jesus came into the world to save just such sinners as you and me? What does St. Paul promise to us imperfect sinners; to us who have been cleansed of sin and clothed with Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism? What does St. Paul promise to us imperfect sinners; to us who eat and drink Christ’s sinless body and holy blood believing that it was given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins? He promises that Jesus **“will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Guiltless, blameless, faultless, perfect, unable to be charged with any lawless act! That’s what imperfect sinners who trust in Jesus are. That’s what YOU, who believe in Jesus and have been baptized into Him are. Not sinless, but guiltless! And by the grace of God at work in the Gospel that’s what Jesus is going to keep you right up to and including the Last Day when you stand before the judgment seat of God.

St. Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, another imperfect church full of imperfect sinners, **“Who shall bring any charge against those who are called by God? God is the one justifying! Who is the one condemning?”** Answer? No one! In Jesus you are more than good. In Jesus you are more than gifted. In Jesus you are perfect.

In Jesus’ name
Amen