

Text: I Corinthians 1:26-31
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
29 January 2017
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My favorite verses in the Bible are heard today, in the 2nd Reading, when St Paul tells his own parishioners in the city of Corinth: “Brothers and sisters, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many of you were powerful, not many of you were of noble birth when God called you to follow Jesus Christ. Instead, God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something.” St Paul knew, that’s who the members of his church were: those who count for nothing in this world. Their own pastor – St Paul – was calling them a basket of deplorables. And that was okay with St Paul.

The city of Corinth, where St Paul had his church, was a busy commercial seaport. There were sailors from all over the world on liberty in the streets of the city, with every pleasure imaginable awaiting them. Corinth had a reputation as the place to go if you wanted a wild time. And those were the people who made up St Paul’s church. They were experiencing God turning their lives around by the power of Jesus, they were trying to leave their old life – but that was making them self-righteous and judgmental. Those Christians in Corinth were making it clear to everyone that, in their own opinion, they were not like the lowlife all around them. When St Paul wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians, he was reminding them, “You are *just* like the lowlife all around you. In fact, you are that lowlife – the only difference is that God has chosen you, forgiven you, but you, on your own, are some pretty messy raw material for God to work with.”

And that remains the Church today: a basket of sinners, grateful that Jesus has given us a second chance, and gives us a second chance, but not perfect, not always succeeding at following Christ, not always living up to the name of Christian, and the high ideals that go with that name.

And that is okay, just as it was okay for St Paul. God the Father never tires of forgiving us, as we try to follow in the footsteps of his Son Jesus. More importantly, God has a purpose in having such a basket of sinners as his Church, his family here on earth. God’s purpose in choosing fallible human beings like us to his witnesses and family on earth is to make clear that the ultimate power to change, transform, and heal the world rests with Him, not with us or any human being who

claims to have the answer, to be the answer - who thinks that they are a success at life on their own, without God. St Paul got it right, when he wrote, "God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God. It is due to God that you are in Christ Jesus." Our life as Christians is all a gift from God, given when we didn't deserve it - and if we look foolish to those around us, for daring to follow Jesus, it's because God's plan for the world, for us, still is unfolding.

Jesus knew this is how it would be for his family in this world. That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." Because as much as we Christians are, and always have been, a mixed bag of saints and sinners, an assorted basket of the deplorables and the promising, nevertheless we are the mixed bag that God has chosen to be his own, to give us new life in Jesus Christ, and to use change the world - by his power alone at work in us. For that we are grateful, and keep taking part in God's unfolding plans, knowing that God's plans will succeed.