

# *Building with Prayer*

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent – March 28, 2004  
Sermon Background Study

## Scripture Passages (NRSV)

### Colossians 3:12-17

<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

<sup>14</sup>And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. <sup>15</sup>See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. <sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

### 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

<sup>5</sup>What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup>So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup>The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

*This week, we continue the series: Building the Kingdom. We return to the subject of prayer and its place in the building of God's kingdom.*

I hope that you've been using the Prayer Journal written by Janet Collinsworth for our capital campaign, *The Priceless Gift: Our New Beginning*. For this week, Janet writes, "God shows His will to us through prayer, comforts us in prayer, gives us peace and healing through prayer, and provides strength and endurance through prayer. Through prayer, God built His kingdom. Through prayer, God built His people. Through prayer, God shows His purpose. Through prayer, God provides for possibilities. Open your heart and hear the gentle whisper of God . . . ."

### Life as Prayer

Today's scripture passages may seem a bit odd to be the basis for a sermon about prayer. After all, none of them

## 1 Corinthians

Corinth, near Athens in southern Greece, was founded in 44BC by Julius Caesar as a colony for Roman veterans. By the time of Paul, Corinth had grown to be a large, commercial port with a reputation as a rough, wild town. Paul first visited Corinth in about 50AD on his second missionary journey. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is responding to a letter(s) that he has received from Corinth, detailing significant problems in the young church. At this time, Christian churches met in the public areas of private homes. Many people were illiterate, so Paul's letters would have been read aloud and circulated among the homes where Christians met to worship.

1 Corinthians is a piece of correspondence, just regular mail. Why did Paul write this letter? Evidently, Paul had been sent a pretty long list of problems in the churches in Corinth. Understanding Paul's response (1 Corinthians) would be easier if we had the letters Paul received. But we do not, so we have to be careful how we handle portions of the letter. We are hearing only half of the conversation! Paul's response details many problems, ranging from marriage and divorce to speaking in tongues to disbelief in the resurrection!

I will be teaching a class on 1 Corinthians in the Bible Academy session that begins this week. It is not too late to register. You can even just show up! Mon. morning at 9:45 and Tues. evening at 6:45.

are focused on teachings about prayer. None of them are a prayer. None of them are even stories about prayer. Instead, these passages are like so many in the Bible; prayer is simply woven through them: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . . be thankful . . . with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms . . . do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him . . . rejoice always . . . pray without ceasing . . . give thanks in all circumstances.”

Prayer is more than what we do, it is who we are – God’s people living in conversation with God at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. Prayer is letting “the word of Christ dwell in us richly”, so that we might “always seek to do good to one another,” so that we are people of “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” Prayer shapes us into a thankful and forgiving people, bound into “perfect harmony.” Prayer shapes us into “one body,” for God calls us to unity . . . something that the Christians in Corinth had forgotten.

### Three Prayers from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer

#### *For serving others:*

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the love of him who laid down his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

#### *For vocation in daily work:*

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in earth” Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves; your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

#### *For the right use of God’s gifts:*

Almighty God, whose loving hand has given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we honor you with all that we have, and remembering the account which we one day must give, may be faithful stewards of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

#### *A common purpose for God’s servants*

Today’s passage from 1 Corinthians is from a section of the letter in which Paul pleads for the unity of the church in Corinth. Paul asks: What is this business about one faction that claims to follow Paul and another that claims to follow Apollos?<sup>1</sup> There are to be no factions among God’s people. Instead, Paul says, though he founded the house churches in Corinth and Apollos worked to help them grow, in truth, it is all God’s work. Paul, Apollos, and the others are all no more than servants doing different tasks. The tasks may differ – one person plants and another waters – but all are working on one project. Paul and the others are “co-workers”<sup>2</sup> in God’s field. Paul uses forceful language to make his point: “the planter and the waterer are *one*” (this is a more literal rendering of verse 8). In no uncertain terms, Christians are to be united in the doing of God’s work. For Paul, this is a message to be heard by all Christian churches.

Paul also wants the Corinthians to understand that, in the end, all this kingdom-building stuff is God’s doing. We may plant some seeds and we may water, but it is God who plants the Gospel and creates a growing community of his people. This echoes Psalm 127:1, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”

Prayer undergirds our common purpose. As I wrote in January, “powerful, life-changing prayer involves our whole self – our heart, our head, and our hands. As we seek to find our heart’s true home, we must no less seek to be the light to the world, breaking forth like the dawn, praying and working for all the world to see.” Paul reminds us that we are to be one body, unified and purposeful, living in unceasing conversation with God as we go about the tasks of kingdom-building that God has entrusted to us.

<sup>1</sup> Apollos, mentioned in Acts, was a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, who came to Corinth to help build God’s church: “He greatly helped those who through grace had become believers” (Acts 18:27). His tutors in the faith were Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who were extremely important to Paul’s ministry.

<sup>2</sup>“God’s servants” in the NRSV is one word in the Greek, *synergoi*, from which we get our word “synergy”!

## Daily Bible Readings

*(Paul calls for unity in the Corinthian church; this outline is from Richard Hays' commentary)*  
Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<b>Day 1</b> 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 <b>Factions in the community</b>	<b>Day 2</b> 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 <b>The foolishness of the cross excludes boasting</b>
<b>Day 3</b> 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4 <b>Wisdom for the mature</b>	<b>Day 4</b> 1 Corinthians 3:5-23 <b>The community and its leaders belong to God</b>
<b>Day 5</b> 1 Corinthians 4:1-21 <b>Paul directly confronts the boasters in Corinth</b>	<b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b>

## Sermon Notes

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### **Spring Bible Academy begins this week!!**

We've got a great schedule of classes! It is NOT too late to register. You can pick up a registration form at the information counter in the Narthex.

Register on-line now -- go to [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org)

### **“After *The Passion*: Bone Boxes and Resurrection”**

**TONIGHT!! 5:30 – 6:45 in Wesley Hall, with Scott Engle**

What happened in the days immediately after Jesus' death on the cross? We'll learn about Jewish bone boxes and what they meant for the promise of resurrection. We'll gain a better sense of the shock and the power of the first Christians' claims that Jesus had been resurrected. Most importantly, we'll see what Jesus' resurrection means for our own!

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Next week is Palm Sunday. It will be a big day in the life of our church as we celebrate the culmination of our capital campaign. From its formation, the community of God's people that calls itself St. Andrew has been about the building of God's kingdom. We've built (more correctly, God has built!) beautiful and expansive facilities that we can use as we minister to others. St. Andrew's leadership has challenged us to finish paying for these buildings so we can turn outward, unencumbered by substantial financial commitments to a mortgage.

Discuss your own visions and dreams for St. Andrew. Paul was very fond of using evocative images of God's church at work. What images or pictures of St. Andrew's future would you paint? What would you like to us to be able to do that we cannot do now? When we talk about “turning outward,” what does this mean to you – in concrete terms?

As we turn outward, serving others, there will be many choices to make about where we will devote our energies and resources. How will prayer help us to make the choices God would have us make? How will prayer help us to listen to and to heed God's direction? How will prayer help us to stay unified, working together to achieve God's purposes? As a congregation, we began a renewed emphasis on prayer two months ago. How has this renewed emphasis on prayer reshaped your vision of St. Andrew or your own role as one of the co-workers in God's field?