

**+ 1 Corinthians 3:16-23 + You Are of Christ! +**  
**+ 3rd Sunday after Pentecost – St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles; Confirmation of Holly Sleeth +**  
**+ 29 June 2014 +**

Loyalty has become rather uncommon these days. In many ways, it's been on the decline for several years now. Numerous studies in a variety of areas have shown that people just aren't as loyal as they once were.

You see it in business. Shoppers typically don't do all their shopping at a single brick-and-mortar store. As prices across the board have gone up, they search for the best deal—and often that's found online. You see it in the job market. Employees don't typically stay with a company for 40 years as they once did, but change companies rather often. You see it in traditional institutions like government or schools or Christian congregations and denominations. For example, one of the fastest growing religious groups are the "nones"—people with no affiliation to a church. Even a traditional institution like marriage is taking all kinds of hits. People prefer to go with what they like rather than what's been reliable in the past. They don't want to depend on "what's always been there", but on themselves.

Since we live in a society where loyalty has become more and more uncommon, the emphasis of this Sunday is rather striking. On this Sunday, we remember with thanksgiving two apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ—Peter and Paul—two men who were loyal to the Lord and the true preaching of his Word to the end. The Scripture readings we heard this morning emphasize the importance of loyalty to Christ. All that encouragement to be loyal to Christ becomes even more personal when you consider that later this morning Holly will be asked to make a vow to remain loyal and faithful to her Lord and his Word even to the point of death.

All of that encouragement to be loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ stands in stark contrast to the rampant lack of loyalty in the world around us and within our own hearts. The Apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians pierce our disloyal hearts, yet heal us with this reality—**YOU ARE OF CHRIST!**

The Corinthian Christians were having some problems with loyalty. Oh, they were very loyal people! The Lord had richly blessed them with many gifts and the opportunity to sit at the feet of two of the early church's greatest teachers—the apostle Paul and the convert Apollos. These teachers were beloved by the Corinthian Christians, but their loyalty and love were misguided. Some preferred Pastor Paul. Others preferred Pastor Apollos. Some preferred another leader of the Christian church—Pastor Cephas (or Peter), and still others tried to one up everyone else by saying, "We follow Christ!" These preferences became rivalries which became factions in opposition to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

No one realized the damage they were doing to their congregation. So the Lord used the Apostle Paul to address their growing issue and to equip them with true loyalty to the One who alone deserved that loyalty. He used an illustration from the farmer's field to help them realize that he and those who had served them were only servants of the Lord, who alone did all the work. ***"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."*** (1 Corinthians 3:6)

He used an illustration from the construction site. ***"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."*** Paul wanted them to realize that neither he nor Apollos nor Peter nor anyone else deserved the loyalty of the Corinthians. Only Christ did.

To make that point even clearer, Paul asked them, ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."*** Paul wanted them to realize that this wasn't about their teachers or the strength of their factions. No, Paul wanted them to realize that this was a heart issue that was threatening to destroy what God had made them to be in Christ—the living stones of God's holy temple and the dwelling place of his Holy Spirit.

So where does your loyalty lie? Is your loyalty to your congregation and the connections you've made here over the years? Is your loyalty to your pastor, whether that's the one standing before you or the one who taught you or confirmed you or ministered to you in the past? Could your loyalty perhaps be to your family or to your job or to your education or to sports—whether the sports you play or the teams for which you cheer?

Thankfully I can say that the Lord has blessed our congregation with relative unity, but where is your heart? Where is your loyalty? You see, for the Corinthians, the problem really wasn't with their love for their teachers or even the factions they had started. It was a heart issue and the same could be said of us. If our hearts aren't devoted to Christ, our Lord, then what are we doing to the temple that God has made us to be? How quickly

we forget that we are to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit when the game comes on or the congregation changes or the activity or family or job takes priority? Who or what has our loyalty at times like that?

It's certainly not Jesus, yet it is Jesus who made us into God's holy temple. It is Jesus who has built us up through his Gospel. It is Jesus who was the perfect dwelling place of the Holy Spirit when he lived a perfect life here on earth—not for himself, but for you and me. It is Jesus who picks up the broken blocks of your misguided loyalty and your wrong priorities and your halfhearted allegiance to him and rebuilds you with his healing forgiveness and grace. Through his Word, Jesus reminds you who you are in him. **“For God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”**

A lack of loyalty is common in our society. It's prevalent in so many places and in so many ways. It's even prevalent among us, but when it comes to your loyalty to Jesus and mine, we can't go along with what's common in society. In a sense, we have to be “counter-cultural”. Listen to Paul's warning, **“Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.”** So to be wise in God's sight, you need to become a fool in the world? What does that have to do with being loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ? What does that mean?

Loyalty to Jesus isn't just a matter of the heart, but it's also a matter of the head. It impacts your worldview. Now that's a term often used to describe how you and I look at the world around us. By nature, your worldview and mine is pretty self-centered. It's all about me, myself, and I and what I want. A message about a self-sacrificing Savior who willingly died on a cross 2,000 years ago seems pretty foolish. The ideas that God created the universe in six 24-hour days or that Jesus actually rose from the dead seem pretty farfetched. We pride ourselves on how great our man-made knowledge is, but to God, that natural worldview seems pretty foolish. He has the one and only way that each of us can be saved, yet we reject him. **“The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”**

Thankfully, the Jesus whom our natural worldview rejects is also the Jesus who transforms our thinking through the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than boast in our own fading human glory, Jesus helps us to see that the foolishness of the cross and of his death for us brings us heavenly glory. His Holy Spirit works through the hearing and studying of the Word to create faith in our hearts and provide us a message found nowhere else—God loved us when we deserved it not and sent his Son to save those who rejected him, even us. He works through water connected with that Word in Holy Baptism to forgive our sins and welcome hostile enemies into his family. He gives us himself for the forgiveness of sins in his Holy Supper. Through all those means, the Holy Spirit turns the light bulb on so we can see that the message of the cross isn't foolishness. No, it's true wisdom from heaven.

Now Paul has some encouragement for us. **“All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”** Paul gives us a whole list of things that often demand our loyalty in this life, whether it's our teachers or leaders, whether it's this world or life or death or even time. If your heart and mind is focused on those things, they can easily become tyrants in your life and leave you lacking in contentment and peace.

Yet Paul reminds us, as he did the Corinthians, that in Christ and because of Christ, these things aren't tyrants anymore demanding the loyalty of our hearts and heads. Instead they are ours and are intended to be loyal in serving us who are **“of Christ”**, who belong to Jesus.

Just think about that for a moment. A pastor ought not demand your loyalty, but is called to serve you with the good news of a Savior who loves you, to admonish you with God's Law to keep you from straying and to heal you with God's forgiveness, to teach you the truths of God's Word and equip you for works of service, to welcome you into God's family at the beginning of life and to usher you into Jesus' loving arms at the end. A congregation ought not demand your loyalty, but exists to connect you with your Savior and with his people through his Word and sacraments.

Now because of Christ, the world serves you as the gateway from this life to the next. This life isn't something to cling to, but becomes an opportunity for you to loyally serve your Savior, while death brings you to the joyous glories of heaven where you'll be with Jesus. The present is the time your Savior gives you to loyally serve him and the future is something that he controls for your eternal good. **All are yours** because **you are of Christ**.

That means you belong to Jesus. As your servant, he was loyal to his heavenly Father to serve you through his suffering and death as a human being, yet he remained true God who overcame death so you could be with him. He remains loyal to his promises of forgiveness, new life, and salvation. He remains loyal to his people even we fail to be loyal to him. So where does your loyalty lie? As you hear Holly make her vow of loyalty to the Lord in a few minutes, renew your vow to the Lord to remain faithful even to the point of death because ***“you are of Christ”***. Amen.