

Our Story – A living story 1 Cor 1:1-9

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Our title, *A Living Story*, explores what it means to have a living faith and to be called to be the church. This letter to the Corinthians was not St Paul's first to them, despite its title and place in our scriptures. St Paul had stayed for some time in Corinth when he founded the church and stayed with the tent-makers Aquila and Priscilla (see Acts 18). The Corinthian Christians were quite a committed bunch but they didn't always get everything right, just like us!

Nevertheless, St Paul encourages them. In v.2, the church is said to be *sanctified in Jesus Christ and called to be holy*. This is the nub of St Paul's whole message. Sanctification or being holy can be understood as being set apart: the church is set apart *in Christ Jesus, by God*. It's not something we do for ourselves; it's a result of our calling, not an optional extra we can choose to buy into. Also (v.5) through the grace of Jesus, the Corinthians *have been enriched in every way*. Despite all their shortcomings, these early Christians do not lack any spiritual gift as they wait for Christ's return (v.7). In many key ways this part of Britain in which we live is just like the ancient city of Corinth and we are like the Corinthian church. We may not have been pagans like the Corinthians, but we also need to be counter-cultural. As Christians we need to *think* differently. St Paul's letter had to deal with some unchristian beliefs and attitudes which had been absorbed by the early Corinthian church, and it's also very easy for us to absorb uncritically attitudes and behaviours from our culture.

An elderly man I knew admitted to me that his chief motivation in life had been to acquire plenty of money in order to avoid the poverty he had known as a child. He saw his wealth as the product of his own effort, and his to spend as he wished. He went very occasionally to church but did not see himself as a part of it. Like a couple in another church who helped by counting the collection each week although they never attended the services. They were happy to *help* the church but not to *be* it. But St Paul's message about the church is all about us being set apart to *be* it, to live as the church every day of our lives.

St Paul wrote in Eph 4:1 *I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*. This might mean for some of us a huge shift in perspective when it comes to how we spend and give what money, time and talents we have. It's simply not an option to think just about *helping* the church or even giving *to* the church: we *are* the church and her reputation, her pastoral and teaching work, her outreach and her financial health are ours: *we are where the buck stops*.

Each of us needs to pray that God will renew us in His image, and that He will grow us into a people whose very attitude and outlook is radically different from many in the wider society around us. We need to keep looking to Jesus, with Him at the centre of our story.

This renewal and transformation may feel rather challenging: we may be feeling unworthy of our calling and that we can't do it. But look at v.8 and 9: God is faithful and will keep us strong to the end. The work is God's: we just have to be open and honest with ourselves and Him and be willing to be changed and used. Our living story thus becomes more full of the grace and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.3).

Witness: Questions to discuss

1. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 and Romans 12: 2. How do these verses amplify St Paul's 1 Cor message? Do we need to develop any particular spiritual practices in order to do what Paul urges? If so, what?
2. In pairs or 3s, listen to each other's story of faith and note the change that being a Christian has made (if any). Help each other to identify specific areas where you probably think differently from others who do not believe in Jesus. Share these ideas with the whole group.
3. Discuss any issues where you may find it difficult to be different from your friends and colleagues, even though you suspect some Christians would disagree. Do you think there are any absolutes, black-and-white areas where Christians *have* to be different?
4. Our finances at St Paul's are such that, if current levels of giving stay the same, we will run out of money this year and will have to consider cutting down on some of our ministry. How do you think we could become more financially secure? *Please feed back your thoughts to the staff team.*