

Epiphany 6 2/13/22
I Corinthians 15:1-20 C

FOR I DELIVERED TO YOU AS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE WHAT I ALSO RECEIVED: THAT CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES, THAT HE WAS BURIED, THAT HE WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES, AND THAT HE APPEARED TO CEPHAS, THEN TO THE TWELVE.

So, here you are – in church this morning, in the fellowship of the communion of saints, the community of believers. So, let me ask you this: Why are you here? Why are you here, as one of the Communion of saints, the community of believers? What brought you here? What is of first importance to you for being here? What is the one non-negotiable that you have to have to be here? The one thing that you must have in order to come here, to part of the communion of saints, the family of Concordia?

Maybe it's the community of believers, that we love and care and look out for one another. After all, Jesus said, "*Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*" (Jn 13:34). So, we love one another. And that's a good thing because life has its thorns and tears, so we help one another out. When someone is grieving, we grieve with them. When someone is sick, we support them. When catastrophe hits, we help one another out. So maybe of first importance is the community of believers.

Or, maybe it's the hymns. Nobody wants to sing long, dreary hymns. Verse after verse, that just go on and on, talking about thorns, and trials, and tears. Nobody wants that. Hymns in church are supposed to reflect earthly life – right? So, we want happy, jolly hymns. After all, your life is happy, jolly every second of every minute of every day, right? You've never had any temptations or thorns or tears in your life. You've never

been to a doctor with an ache or pain in your body. You've never once had a shouting match, a knuckle-dragging free-for-all with your spouse. And, I know, I know, not one of you has ever shoveled even one shovel full of snow. Yes, on Christmas Eve, you get like 1.5 inches that looks just beautiful with the Christmas lights, but by the morning of December 26th, it's all melted so you can keep your tee time at the golf course.

And a band, with banjo. You gotta have a banjo in the band, right? So, maybe the hymns and music are of first importance.

And, the time. Do I ever dare mention this one? Maybe the time of the worship service is of first importance. It can't, it just can't be at 8:00 AM. Sunday is the one day I can sleep in and I'm not getting up to go to church in the dark. And, it can't be at like 10, or 10:30, because by then all the other churches are out, and I can't get a table at the café to have breakfast. So, maybe of first importance is what time church is.

Or maybe it's the ... pastor. 35 years old, with 20 years of experience as a pastor. And his sermons. He never talks about sin. He never hurts anyone's feelings, he never offends anyone, by telling them they're bad and they need to change. He just tells jokes and people laugh. Except, of course, when he tells the tear-jerker story and the whole congregation from youngest to oldest ... sheds a tear. And he would never, ever, even if it were Super Bowl Sunday mention football in the sermon. {AMEN}. Everyone loves him.

And he would never wear that dress-thing. What's with that, anyway? No, he would skin tight jeans, his flannel shirt would hang out, and he would prance and dance all over the chancel. He would have a lovely wife, and 2.5 above-average children. He would work 24 hours a day, seven

days a week. And, he would do all this for \$ 12,000 a year. Maybe of first importance is the pastor.

Or maybe, just maybe, the one thing of most importance is ... coffee. I mean, it has to taste great, right. It has to be a light brew, or a dark brew, or French Vanilla. It has to be just right to make everyone satisfied, down to the last drop. Which means it most certainly cannot be ... decaffeinated. No, no, no. I think we would all agree that of first importance is the coffee.

Which of these things is of first importance?

As you consider that, consider the church at Corinth. Here you had the communion of saints, the community of believers, and they were a bunch of sinners. They had people struggling with incest; they had people visiting prostitutes; they were angry, fighting with one another to the point of suing one another in civil court; they had people puffed up and proud of what they did in the congregation to the point they were looking down their nose at other members of the congregation. They weren't serving one another; they had a hard time even loving one another.

Even when it came to what the Christian faith itself is, they had problems. They were struggling with the question of whether the body and blood of Christ was really, truly present in the Lord's Supper. They had some who used the Lord's Supper as an excuse to get drunk. They had some who did not even believe in the resurrection of the body.

When you look at the church at Corinth, they had all those things. And that was all sin, because those people who came to church and made up the church were all sinners.

And honestly, every congregation has that. They have some who are puffed up with pride and arrogance over what they do in the church and look down their nose at others. There is envy and jealousy. Gossip.

Anger. People not caring for one another; let alone loving one another. Every congregation struggles over what is of first importance.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (vv. 3-5).

Paul says that the thing of first importance for the Christian congregation is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because that is the thing that gives Communion of Saints, the community of believers, the congregation of Concordia the forgiveness of sins. Just as the Scriptures say, “He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed” (Is 53:5). And Paul says, “[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Ro 4:35). By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sin is atoned for. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the matter of first importance in the church.

So when it comes to the communion of saints, the community of believers, what do they gather around? They gather around the Gospel – the Word and the Sacraments, because that is the means that God Himself has chosen to forgive sins. Those are the means that God Himself has chosen to do His work in us.

Which means that through the hearing and the learning of that Word, we are united in the faith. We confess it in the Creed because that is what the faith is, and that is what we believe.

And, because we have been baptized into Christ, Christ lives in us and we live in Christ. And there is that beautiful passage of Scripture Paul writes, *Christ's love compels us (2 Co 5:14)*. We love one another, and it shows in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

And our structure and style, what we do here, what is sung here, what is read here, is all about Jesus. Everything that we do proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Consider the church at Corinth, and consider this church. What is of first importance is not simply looking out for one another; or hymns; or the time of worship; or the pastor; or coffee. Of first importance is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, when the matter of first importance is the death and resurrection of Jesus, everything else just falls into place.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.