



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 15, 2009
6th Sunday after Epiphany
2 Corinthians 1:3-7
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 2 Kings 5:1-14
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 32
Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7
Gospel: Mark 1:40-45

Share and Share Alike

In Christ's sufferings

In Christ's comfort

Think back to your childhood, or if you're a child, think about your childhood. Did mom or dad have to tell you to share with a brother or sister? Or when with other kids, did they have to teach you to share your stuff and not just keep it all to yourself all the time? Sharing isn't something that we naturally do all that well. It almost seems like the only thing we are really good at sharing at this time of the year is a cold virus or the flu bug. We share that continually.

When we get to be adults, we aren't necessarily all that better at sharing. If I'm teaching a Bible class and I've got a hot cup of coffee and I want to drink it before it gets cold, all I have to do is ask the class to share something from their personal life that fits what we're talking about. I can drink coffee for quite awhile as the silence sits there because no one wants to say "boo" and say anything about themselves to the people around them.

This morning as we look at what the Holy Spirit had Paul write to the Corinthians, we see just how much it also applies to us. Our God wants us to learn to share, to share and share alike, at whatever age we are, especially when it comes to sharing the Gospel message of all comfort. As Christians, as we live for God, we are told we will share in the sufferings of Christ. But also, the more we have shared in suffering, the more we will be able to share in the comfort that only Christ can bring.

That's an important lesson for us to learn. It's important not only for us to learn it but to live it with one another because we are going to face things that cause us difficulty each and every day of our lives in this sinful world.

When Paul writes his second letter to the Corinthians and he's talking about suffering, and suffering for the sake of the Gospel, he's not just whistling Dixie. Paul wrote his second letter because there were those super apostles among the Christians in Corinth that were attacking Paul. They were attacking his person, his ministry, and even his personal characteristics. They seem to be making fun of the way that he talked and that he wasn't a very powerful speaker like they were. I don't know, maybe they are mocking him because he had a girly voice or something and they're saying "We've got a deep voice. We must be better than he is;" something along those lines. It was getting

really personal and really nasty. When you read between the lines of 2 Corinthians, you can see some of these accusations in there, and it's not nice. I'm amazed whenever I study 2 Corinthians that Paul responds with so much Christian love, because I would sure be tempted to respond in some different way that would get my point across a little quicker and with a little bit more of a barb on the end of the words.

But Paul talks to them about why he is so concerned about them and why he wants to share with them. He says, "I know that we share in suffering." What had happened in Corinth is that when he wrote his first letter, they had a guy who was committing incest and they were all praising him saying, "Look at our freedom in Christ. We are free to do these things." Paul had to write to them and say, "That's sin. You can't do that." And of course that led some of them to attack Paul I'm sure. But there were people that listened to Paul and stood up and said what was right. Can you imagine the groups within the congregation in Corinth circling around to attack the people that were standing up for what was right? Maybe this was their relative that was being admonished for doing something sinful and "if you're talking to them, why aren't you talking to Joe Blo over there on the other side of Corinth?" Not addressing whether what was being said was right or wrong; but you know how we can get, how we can circle the wagons and how we defend ourselves against admonishment by pointing out the sins of someone else and saying "Why don't you talk to them?" You know at times how personal we can get when we are upset with what someone else has done for us. You understand that. You know that. That's what Paul had experienced. He had suffered for the sake of the Gospel in ways like that and that's exactly what was going on as he wrote to Corinth.

He had also suffered in bigger ways for the Gospel. He writes in 2 Corinthians about being stoned, having people hurl stones at him to kill him because he was preaching the Gospel. He talks about being left for dead a couple of times. He talks about being shipwrecked and left in the open sea. He talks about all these things that had happened to him; the sufferings he had endured because he was preaching the Gospel. It's kind of along the line of saying, "If you guys think that by your bad mouthing me you are going to shake me off of talking about Jesus as the only way to heaven, guess again. It isn't going to happen."

Paul had suffered. As he suffered, he had to reevaluate continually why he was willing to endure this suffering. The reason he was willing to endure it was because at one time he was separated from God. He was a persecutor of Jesus Christ. He was on the road to hell. And he was marching proudly and fiercely toward it because he thought he was actually serving God. Now he had learned how God had taken away his sins. He had been confronted with his sins by God and then assured by God himself that that sin was taken away. Now he treasured what he had and he was going to let nothing keep him from proclaiming the love of Jesus Christ.

So he says to them, "You guys can relate to this. When you have suffered in any way, shape or form in this world, you know what it's like when someone else is facing that same kind of suffering and can help them out." We can understand that too. We do

that. There are a lot of people in the congregation I see doing that. But he says more specifically now, "This specific kind of suffering you are facing, where you are suffering for the sake of Christ, where the sufferings of Christ are flowing over into your life because you are doing what's right before God and others around you don't like it, don't give up. Keep doing it." He shares comfort with them as they face that kind of suffering.

If you and I live our faith, if we do what is right before God, there will be times when we will stick out, when we won't be going with the flow. We'll be a stranger in the crowd. When that takes place in the work place or in other places, it can create things for us that are uncomfortable. People respond to us by acting like we are weird because we would say that something is wrong or sinful and that shouldn't be done. People react to us differently. They pat us on the head as though we are outdated and outmoded and a backwards lot.

But sometimes it gets more personal. It gets angry. It might even cost you a promotion or a job. When you suffer for the sake of living for Jesus, you may well end up saying to yourself, "Is this really worth it? Is it worth it to me to lose a friend because I have to admonish them because what they are doing is wrong before God? Is it worth it to me to stand up and say 'No, I can't do that; that's sin' and have it cost me a promotion in the workplace? Is it going to hurt my family? Can I justify it that way?" We can go through all kinds of different rationalizations.

As we live for God, we will suffer because we are doing what God wants us to do at times. Jesus said, "If they hated me, they are going to hate you. If they never hate you, you better reevaluate. You might be living more like the world than like me."

God has commanded us to do these things and when we fail to do it, we sin. You and I do it often for the sake of what we can see in front of us; the comfort of our feelings, the comfort of our friends, the comfort of our relatives. We don't want to put up walls between us so we say, "God, you're going to have to send someone else because I'm not going to do it." We sin.

It kind of takes you back a little bit to the Gospel that we read. Jesus heals this guy of his leprosy and says, "Here's the one thing I don't want you to do." And the guy goes and does it, right? He makes Jesus' life tough. God says to us, "I love you. I have taken away your sins. Here's what I want you to do – teach and admonish one another, rebuke, and encourage one another even if it causes you difficulty." We say to God, "I'm going to do the exact opposite" sometimes. Just like that guy that was cured of leprosy.

The comfort we have is that our God loves us and forgives us for the sake of Jesus Christ when you and I have failed him. The more we stay focused on that comfort, the more we see what is at stake, the more we are willing to put ourselves and our own discomfort on the line because what is at stake is the eternal welfare of souls.

Paul was willing to address the Corinthians in whatever way it would take so that they would not lose the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was convinced that if they followed the super apostles, they had a different gospel. It centered on man. It centered on following men. It didn't center on Jesus Christ. If he let them continue that path, they were going to hell. So he was willing to suffer their slings and their barbs because he had been comforted by a God that had taken away his sins, and he wanted them to have that same exact comfort.

The more we focus on the reward side of the risk that we put ourselves in at times; the reward side of it is not that God rewards us because we live for him, but the blessing that the people receive when we point out both Law and Gospel in their lives and point them to Jesus. They see their Savior. They repent. They are forgiven. They have eternal life, and we grow closer to God and grow closer to one another. That's why we have this great comfort, and that's why we focus on the God of all comfort and not on ourselves. We live for him, not for our comfort. We live for him, not for our ease. We live for him, not for just getting along with everyone.

When we focus on this incredible comfort the God of all comfort has brought to us; the comfort that says, "I know who you are. I know what you're like. You're sins stink in my nostrils, but I still love you. I've still taken them away." The more we focus on that comfort, the more we will share and share alike the only comfort that we have in life – Jesus Christ.