



Who's Who?

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Vienna Presbyterian Church

1 Corinthians 3:4-11, 21-23

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Were it not for seven women and two men, none of us would be here this morning. 150 years ago this summer, seven charter members, plus two more, established the Vienna Presbyterian Church. We are celebrating! Happy Sesquicentennial, everyone! (Now turn to your neighbor and greet them with that tongue twister through our muffled masks. 😊)

Praise our God! Praise our God for his exceeding faithfulness; for the vision that called this congregation into being; for the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit; for thousands of members upon whose shoulders we stand; for leaders and pastors; for the proclamation of the Gospel, the making of disciples, the care and nurture of one another, and the sending forth in mission. Praise our God that our new pastor, Hope Lee, will very soon be with us and lead us into the glorious future God has for VPC!

Join me again in repeating the opening and closing verses of Psalm 150. Let's together express our thanks to God!

“Praise the Lord!

Praise God in this sanctuary!

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!”

Now, raise your hand if you can name all nine of the original members. Raise your hand if you can name the first pastor of this congregation. (Reverend John Brown, not the radical abolitionist!) Can you name the first five pastors? Can you name all the pastors through 1999? That is precisely the point! *Who's Who?* We would abysmally fail a test to name the dozens of pastors who have led this congregation, let alone the thousands who have been members over the past 150 years.

God, of course, chooses to use people to establish and build His church. The account of Pentecost in Acts describes the exhilarating birth of the church. The New Testament likens the church to a body, a field, a building, a family, a temple, a fellowship. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*. It literally means a congregation or assembly called both “out” and “to.” Those original nine members were called *out* in order *to* form a congregation: Vienna Presbyterian Church. Happy Sesquicentennial!

However, there is irony. We would not be here this morning were it not for those original nine. The church at Corinth (today's Scripture) would not have been established without *its* human founders. And yet, the ministry of the church is *never* about any one person *other than* the person of Jesus Christ. HE, alone, is the cornerstone. HE, alone, is the foundation upon whom we build. HE, alone, is the ONE whom we worship and adore.

People come and go. Members join and leave. Pastors start and finish. Babies are baptized, the Lord's Supper is shared, students are confirmed, marriage covenants are made,

and beloved ones are memorialized as they enter everlasting life. People come, and people go. Jesus Christ remains the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

So how about the name of someone we *do* remember and know? The apostle Paul.

Paul wrote many of the New Testament epistles. However, he was not a “lone ranger” in ministry. He always worked with a team. And diverse teams, at that. Men and women. Gentiles and Jews. Different ages and stages of faith. At Corinth, for a year and a half, he worked side by side with believers such as Priscilla and Aquila, Silas and Timothy. Together, they had one objective: to testify and teach that Jesus was the Messiah. 1 Corinthians, chapter one: “...[W]e proclaim Christ crucified...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (vv. 23-24). 1 Corinthians, chapter fifteen: “...Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures...was buried...and...was raised on the third day” (vv. 3-4). *THAT* is the Gospel Paul and his co-workers proclaimed.

Our three core beliefs here at VPC mirror these: 1) Jesus is Lord; 2) Scripture is our authority; 3) We are all called to follow Jesus.

The young Corinthian church was on fire for Jesus. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and exercised all kinds of spiritual gifts, from the seemingly routine to the attention-grabbing sensational, like prophesying and speaking in tongues. Over time, factions began to develop.

Several years after he had left Corinth, Paul received an urgent letter from Chloe, a prominent leader at Corinth. Divided loyalties were threatening the unity of the Corinthian church. The unanimity and harmony *possible* through the Holy Spirit were being quenched. This news greatly distressed Paul. So he wrote them a letter we now call 1 Corinthians.

Listen to a small portion of the Scripture again from Eugene Peterson’s blunter paraphrase: “When one of you says, ‘I’m on Paul’s side,’ and another says, ‘I’m for Apollos,’ aren’t you being totally infantile?”

Who do you think Paul is, anyway? Or Apollos, for that matter? Servants, both of us...

I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but *God* made you grow.”

Here’s what Paul was saying: the church is like a field in which GOD is at work. Paul, Apollos, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, and Chloe were merely the hired hands. And so are we! GOD is after a super-abundant harvest of committed disciples, not a patchwork of divided, subsistence plots yielding little fruit. GOD has been exceedingly faithful to VPC for 150 years! GOD has brought forth abundant harvests of people who love and serve Jesus Christ. GOD will continue to do so because God’s story is still unfolding!

Our English language has no plural form for “you.” But Greek, the language in which Paul wrote, does. And that’s pretty much all he uses to write to the Corinthians. The meaning for us is clear: No lone-ranger Christians; no discipleship that so emphasizes our *individual* relationships with Jesus, that we forget we are part of a *body*! God calls us to grow and mature

together, upholding one another, encouraging one another, coming alongside one another in times of heartache and times of joy. THIS is the church God invites us to continue to be.

Because, paradoxically, though the church is never about following any one person other than the person of Jesus Christ, the church is *nothing* without its people.

“I am the church, you are the church, we are the church, together. All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we’re the church together. The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is its people.”

So on this 150th anniversary, will you recommit to being the people of God in community and in unity, loving one another well? Will you recommit to our core beliefs that Jesus is Lord, that Scripture is our authority, and that we are called, together, to follow Jesus?

Like you, I have 16 great-great grandparents. I can only readily name 2 of them: Hiram Gibson from Georgia, and William Thornton Innes from Pennsylvania. Several generations from now, hardly anyone will remember my name, just as most of us don’t remember the names of those who first built this church. But there is one name, one person, who endures through all eternity. Jesus Christ. No other name. No other foundation. He, alone, is our Cornerstone.

So, Happy Sesquicentennial, people of God at Vienna Presbyterian Church. Our story, God’s story, is still unfolding! The Great Adventure continues! Thanks be to God!