

Vintage Festival Sunday  
I Corinthians 3: 5-11  
September 30, 2007

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, California

### A Fruitful Partnership

Two days before I was ordained, my mentor, friend and spiritual director Brian Taylor led me in retreat. We focused on the promises I would be making – to be guided by my bishop, to be diligent in the reading and study of scripture, to minister through word and sacrament so that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received, to be a faithful pastor, to pattern my life according to Christ’s teaching, to persevere in prayer.

We spent time exploring each of these promises – looking at what they meant to me and what they asked of me; looking at how they gave me hope; looking at how they gave me pause. Some of those promises came easily to me and some scared the living daylights out of me.

Then Brian landed – pounced might be a better word for it – on the words the Bishop would speak in response to my promises. At the end of the examination the Bishop says, “May the Lord who has given you the will to do these things give you the grace and power to perform them.” “May the Lord who has given you the will to do these things give you the grace and power to perform them.”

Those words seemed to have a special charge for Brian – a different depth of meaning than they had for me. I was focusing on what I had to do, to think, to be. But Brian lingered on those words – “May the Lord who has given you the will to do these things give you the grace and power to perform them.” At the time I didn’t really get the connection. I was focusing on one side of the coin – the doing of or rather my doing ministry. Brian was focusing on the other side of the coin – God’s grace present in the doing of ministry.

We often get lost on one side or the other of that coin. The people at Corinth, the people Paul was writing to, seemed to be lost on the side of the doing. They were focusing on the efforts of Paul or the efforts of Apollos, giving credit and I suppose allegiance to one or to the other. Paul saw things differently. How does he put it – “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth”.

Try to split that coin – imagine the planting and watering without all that’s necessary for growth to occur – rich soil, sun and a benevolent climate. Inconceivable.

Imagine the growth without the planting or watering. Again inconceivable.

Living as we do in a community tied to the land and products of the land, we know how important the planting, watering, pruning and feeding are to the harvest. But we also know how important factors beyond our control are to an abundant harvest. We plant, we water, but God gives the growth.

I like to think of us as invited into a partnership with God. We each bring what we have – our own unique set of skills, talents, knowledge, experience, resources, interests and inclinations – into this partnership. God works with what we bring and what we do to create a new world. God doesn’t do it on God’s own. God needs us – each of us – to bring this world into being.

So it is with the Church. So it is with the part of the Body of Christ we call Trinity. Each of us is vital to the whole for we each bring our own unique gifts to this community. As Paul put it later in that first letter to the Corinthians, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” God has given to each of us gifts that we bring to this community, this part of the Body of Christ. Some have the gift of teaching, others the gift of counting, some reading, some praying, some singing, some moving gracefully at the altar, some the gift of raising money, others the gift of sharing what we do with the rest of Sonoma, some the gift of seeing that the buildings

and grounds get cared for, some the gift of caring for others. God needs us to bring those gifts to the work of building God's kingdom. Remember – Paul did the planting and Apollos the watering.

But we need God as well. It is easy to get lost on the human side of the coin, to wander in the land where despair and discouragement and arrogance and pride lurk, to work and worry as if it were all up to us. It's not. Remember, Paul did plant and Apollos did water, but God gave the growth. That's a truth hard to wrap one's head around. Particularly for people steeped as we are in a culture of individualism. But we know this truth in our bones and in our very being.

Take a moment, look back through the seasons of your life. Stop and linger over moments when you felt success or failure was up to you. Remember times when you wondered how you would get through. Think of the times you surprised yourself simply getting through what at the moment seemed impossible or impassable. Our own lives offer powerful witness to the grace of God at work.

But there's more to learn from the seasons of our lives. Look back again this time noticing the moments when your unique gifts made a difference. Remember the times when you knew without a doubt you were using the gifts God gave you. Our own lives also offer powerful testimony to our amazing partnership with God.

We are invited, you and I, to live in partnership with God.

We are called, you and I, to bring to bear in God's world the gifts and talents God has given us.

We are called, you and I, to plant and to harvest the fruits of God's abundant love.

Let us live in and work in confidence that we are partners with God.

Amen.

