

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, January 28th, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Living in the Grey Areas of Life
Fourth Sunday of Epiphany
1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

God calls us to seek justice:

Let Christ's love for the poor and hungry fill the earth.

God calls us to show kindness,

Let Christ's light shine in places of brokenness and despair.

God calls us to walk humbly in the Spirit,

Let us join the work of the kingdom in humility and hope.

Called, blessed and inspired, let us worship God together.

Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of wisdom and blessing,

On this blessed day we come into the warmth of your presence.

Here we find shelter in the strength of your promises;

here we find welcome in your tender care.

Grateful for the protection you provide,

thankful for the comfort of your community,

we offer our praise to you.

For you give blessing when the world condemns;

you bring freedom when the culture confines.

Embrace us with your love in this hour of worship

as we offer you our love in return

Children's Hymn VIDEO: "Jesus Loves Me"

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

God of the ages,
we confess the world's wisdom attracts us, in advertisement and argument.
We fail to measure messages according to the wisdom in your Word.
We find calls to do justice too demanding,
for the world has taught us to look to our own interests first.
Forgive us, we pray.
Renew us with your mercy,
so that we may walk more humbly with you and each other day by day. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
Though God knows our failings, forgiveness is ours in Jesus Christ.
Rejoice and be glad for his renewing love.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.

Responsive Reading**Psalm 111**

111 Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

² Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.

³ Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.

⁴ He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

⁵ He provides food for those who fear him;

he remembers his covenant forever.

**⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.**

⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;

**⁸ they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.**

⁹ He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!

**¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever!**

Opening Hymn #483: "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken" (V 1,2,3)

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God.
One whose Word cannot be broken
formed thee for His own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See, the streams of living waters,
springing from eternal love,
well supply thy sons and daughters
and all fear of want remove.
Who can faint while such a river
ever will their thirst assuage?
Grace, which like the Lord, the Giver,
never fails from age to age.

'Round each habitation hov'ring,
see the cloud and fire appear
for a glory and a cov'ring,
showing that the Lord is near.
Thus they march, the pillar leading
light by night and shade by day,
daily on the mana feeding
which God gives them when they pray.

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

8 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ²If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

⁴Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹²Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Sermon

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if everything in life was written out in black and white? Wouldn’t it be great to know that only right and wrong existed as an answer to every question and every situation that we face in this world? It would make our complex lives so much simpler if the challenge of making decisions boiled down to a simple right or wrong every time.

However, life is not like that. Yes, there are some things that we can put in black and white categories. The Bible does an excellent job of teaching us right from wrong in our lives. The Ten Commandments in particular clearly state some things which are wrong. Adultery is clearly a sin. As is murder, covetousness, and stealing. Jesus made this a little more complex when he told us anger is the same as murder and lust is the same as adultery. However, while there are people who will debate what anger is and what lust is, they all agree that adultery and murder are sins.

The Bible also tells us some things which are clearly right. Honoring God, honoring our parents and honoring the sabbath are all things which are right according to the Ten Commandments.

Yet even though the Bible has clarity on these aspects of life, there are thousands upon thousands of decisions we need to make that do not fall within the lessons and clarity of the Ten Commandments. Life is not black and white, it is shades of grey, so how is a Christian meant to walk with Christ in a world where right and wrong are so intermixed?

We live in a complex world, and Christians face a wide array of challenges and choices in this world that do not fall into the black and white areas of Scripture that we find in the Bible.

For example, movies and television shows. There are many Christians out there in the world that struggle with whether or not they should even go to the movies, yet alone what kind of movies they can watch. Alcohol is another of the grey areas. There are some churches that refuse to serve anything but wine at Communion and others that refuse to serve anything but grape juice, then there are the rebels who serve both! But what about outside of the church. In Europe there are some churches that have small bars that are church run attached to the church and they do not see the moderate consumption of alcohol as a sin, and there are some churches in the southern US who think if a drop of alcohol brushes your lips you are sinner. Mind you the American churches who like to condemn the European churches because of their alcohol consumption are also condemned by the European churches because of their apparent turning of a blind eye to gluttony and the weight and health issues that are prevalent.

Then what about things like make-up, tattoos and piercings? What about playing cards or dancing? Some churches see no issue with this, and others consider these things the work of the devil!

Then there are the questions that every Pastor faces around each of the major holidays in our culture. What about the easter bunny and Easter, can you hide eggs and have an egg hunt? At Christmas, what about Santa Claus and Christmas trees? Halloween is a point of conflict between some churches and some congregants! The only Holidays that we can seem to reach a consensus on are the ones like Victoria day and Labor day, which are completely secular in their practice.

Then there are the questions around clothing! Can you wear clothing made of mixed materials? Can women wear pants or can a man have long hair?

What about gambling, smoking, or all of the thousands and thousand aspects of life to which there is no clear right and wrong in the Bible? How does a Christian decide what to do in these situations? Do we trust our heart as the world likes to teach us?

This is what Paul is trying to answer in his response to the Corinthians. While the Bible might seem to have nothing to say on these so-called grey areas of life it does actually speak with some clarity about doing what is right and wrong in the eyes of God in this world.

In one of churches in the city of Corinth, there was a question about the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. This is something we do not understand very well today, because there are not a lot of pagan temples out there in the world sacrificing animals anymore, but this is something that the people of Corinth experienced every day.

Most of the meat that was available in the markets came from the pagan temples in the area. When someone brought an animal to be sacrificed to a pagan god, part of the animal was burned on the altar, a part was sent home with the person who made the sacrifice to eat with their family, the rest was left to the temple of which a part was eaten in the temple ceremonies and by the families of the priests. Yet because of the sure abundance of sacrifices that were happening, the temple often had way more meat than the priests and other people who worked in temples could ever consume. This meat was sold in the local markets to make more money for the temple.

The Jews of the time believed that meat which was used in these pagan ceremonies was tainted and could be infected with demons and evil spirits, so they forbade the eating of meat which had been used in sacrifices to pagan deities.

The church in Corinth was challenging this belief. They wanted to know if the ritual of a pagan sacrifice somehow automatically tainted the food with some form of spiritual affliction. Could Christians eat the meat they could purchase at the market that had been offered to a pagan god at a cheaper price or did they have to seek out meat that had not been offered in sacrifice and be forced to pay a premium for that meat?

Some of the believers of that were in the church in Corinth embraced the idea of liberty that they had obtained through their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour!

They knew and understood that they had been set free for the world by their faith and they felt that they could freely eat the meat offered to idols because it had no meaning to them. So, they appealed to Paul to prove to their fellow believers that it did not matter if they ate meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols. They had a point to prove to all those who said that they should not eat that meat.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

⁴Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Paul told the Corinthians to embrace their liberty, that it does not matter if you eat the meat that has been sacrificed to idols, because you know that there is only really One True Living God, and all those pagan idols are not gods at all, so in reality, the meat has been offered to nothing.

However, Paul does not stop there!

1 Corinthians 8:7-13

⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

He says to the Church in Corinth, 'Yes, you can eat that meat from the pagan sacrifice, but do not be too proud of yourselves!' He reminds them of the reality that there are many people who still believe in those pagan idols, and to them eating the meat that was sacrificed to a pagan idol could have a different meaning. To eat the meat of that pagan idol means to believe in the blessing and power of that idol, and for the unbeliever or the weak in faith this could lead to them stumbling in their faith, simply because you took your liberty, your freedom in Christ and lived according to it without consideration of those around you.

Imagine it this way: You are invited to a ceremony at the church of a pagan god. You know that the pagan god that is worshiped there is not real, and so you see no real problem in going to the temple of that pagan god and observing the ceremony and taking part in the reception. And you are correct, being there has absolutely no bearing on your faith and your salvation.

However, let's say someone who is not as matured and strong in the faith sees you go down to that ceremony and take part in the reception, eating the meat that had been sacrificed to that pagan idol. And they think to themselves, that person knows much more than me about Christianity, and if they are doing it, then it must be ok. So, they go to a ceremony at a pagan church and partake in the meal, but later they are confused by the teachings of the pagan worshippers and their own understanding of Christianity. So, they begin to blend the faith of Christianity and the worship of pagan idolatry. And it slowly destroys their faith, and they are led astray by false teachings and false prophets. This is what Paul is warning against.

He is saying do not take the knowledge that you have in regard to your faith and freedom in Christ as a privilege to do as you wish. Even though we have liberty in Christ, we have accountability to our brothers and sisters in Christ. He tells them it would be better to give up ever eating meat again than to make a brother or sister in the faith stumble in their walk with God. So what Paul is telling them is that it is not a question of what is legally right or wrong, but instead is an ethical question.

And this is where the grey areas of the Bible often end up. In this grey area of life between what we know is allowable in the liberty we have in Christ, and the importance of not causing our brothers and sisters to stumble in their own walk with God because of our liberties.

Paul offers up, two ways for us to come to a faithful conclusion when we face these grey areas in our life. Firstly, Paul instructs the Corinthians to let love be their guide in these matters.

1 Corinthians 8:1

8 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.

The problem that many Christians face is they let the pride that they have in their faith and understanding of the Word of God, get in the way of loving others. When we think we have all of the answers and we know all there is to know, we can get puffed up and feel that we are spiritually superior to others. We see this often in the modern church in the competition between denominations, and in the Christians of different nations. Like the Europeans that have no problem with alcohol and the Americans that find it a blasphemous sin.

This is not what we are supposed to be doing.

Augustine of Hippo said it best!

“In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, love.” - Augustine of Hippo

This means that when it comes to doctrinal things, we need to stand tough. When the Bible says something is a sin, it is a sin, full stop, no need for debate or discussion. However, in the grey areas, like how someone is baptized, by dunking or sprinkling, we need to have liberty.

Love and unity are what build up the church of God when we exercise them properly.

You see love is the principle that creates the boundaries around our liberty.

The modern decay we see in the morality of our culture did not come about because gambling was legalized, or because someone saw a movie they should not have, or because someone played cards, or smoked a cigarette. It did not even come about because of the Christian who made a questionable choice in a grey area of their life.

The moral decay that we are experiencing right now in our culture has come about because we have embraced the right to individual liberty without the understanding of the Christian responsibility to love our neighbor. When we have freedom of choice and living without any accountability or responsibility to others it leads to selfishness.

Paul teaches in chapter 13 of Corinthians that.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This means that just because we have freedom and liberty in Christ it does not mean we have the freedom to live our lives any way we want. We have freedom, but we also need to understand that we have a responsibility to care for others. Love is what reminds us of our responsibility to others and our accountability to God.

Jesus was our example, he chose to humble himself and in obedience to the Father went to the cross to die for our sins, something he could have prevented at any time.

Christians are called to build up the body of Christ in the way they live and love others. When we show the love of Christ to brothers and sisters who are still maturing in their faith, by setting aside our own interests in service of their faith we build up the body of Christ and the local church.

As Paul stated, sacrifice may often become a part of what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ. Paul was willing never to eat meat if it meant supporting a brother. He was willing to give up a freedom he enjoyed if that freedom put the faith of one of the less spiritually mature at risk in their faith. He did not demand that others know and understand his freedom, he did not cling to his rights, instead he willingly embraced his responsibility to his brother.

Building upon last week. When you find yourself in a situation where you are aligned with the Word of God and know that you can freely partake in a grey area of life. Ask yourself, 'Am I willing to stop what I am doing if I find out it is causing another person to question their faith?'

If you can answer that question in the affirmative, if you can say yes with a clear conscience, then you are understanding what God is asking of us in these grey areas, a willingness to sacrifice in the same way that Christ sacrificed himself for each of us.

Jesus did not cling to his rights as God, but instead made himself nothing for the sake of humanity. Christ lived his life as an example for us to follow, so let's be willing to follow every aspect of his life. To pick up our cross and bear it as we walk alongside him.

The way we live our lives is contagious. When we live lives filled with love and sacrifice for others, people begin to see what Jesus Christ did for us and have hope that he will do the same for them, and then they too can begin to live in the same manner.

This is what it means to be the Salt and Light of God's Word in this broken and dark world.

Let us pray,

Enlighten Our Darkened Hearts

Lord God, heavenly Father,
 you have graciously opened the eyes of the blind
 through your Son Christ Jesus,
 and have let us poor sinners see your light.
 Enlighten our darkened hearts
 so that we may rightly learn and know Christ your Son,
 who died on the cross for us,
 and was counted guilty of our sins.
 May we see your gracious help and mercy
 in all our needs and afflictions,
 and may we seek that help
 through faithful prayer
 and find our comfort and defense against the devil,
 and finally, be delivered in death. **Amen.**

Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Quinquagesima

Hymn #357: "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" (V 1,2,3)

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
 in a believer's ear!
 It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
 and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole
 and calms the troubled breast;
 'tis manna to the hungry soul,
 and to the weary, rest.

Jesus my shepherd, guardian, friend,
 my Prophet, Priest, and King,
 my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
 accept the praise I bring.

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We

also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspertthoffering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #411: “Stand Up and Bless the Lord” (V 1,2,4)

Stand up and bless the Lord,
God’s people now rejoice;
stand up and bless the Lord your God
with heart and soul and voice.

Though high above all praise,
above all blessing high,
who would not fear God’s holy name
and praise and magnify?

God is our strength and song,
now is salvation ours;
God’s love in Christ we now proclaim
with all our ransomed powers.

Pastoral Prayer

Blessed are you, most holy God,
for you give release to the captives and food to the hungry.
Bless us as we hunger and thirst for your justice and righteousness.
May all who are needy find their hope in you.

Compassionate God, we thank you for your mercy.
You give pardon for our sin and call us to forgive others.
Embrace with your renewing grace those who are resentful or discouraged.
Help us serve as instruments of reconciliation when discord or conflict arises.

Righteous God, we thank you for your justice.
You watch over all who suffer and empower your people to act for good.
Bless the work of our church and its partners
to advocate for justice and dignity in our communities and in your world.

Keep safe all who live under threat of violence or struggle for life's necessities.

Caring God, we thank you for your comfort.
You strengthen us when we are weak and pick us up when we fall.
Bless us as we support and care for one another in this community.
Surround all who mourn with the warmth of your love and the light of our hope
in Christ Jesus.

God of new life, we give you thanks for your enlivening Spirit.
You give courage to the persecuted and inspire the weary.
Bless us as we strive to make a difference as a community in Christ's name.
Unite your Church by the power of your Holy Spirit,
and strengthen our common witness with the gifts you offer us through Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
as the One True Living God,
Amen.

Benediction

May the God of justice strengthen your will to serve.
May the Christ of compassion inspire your heart to love.
May the Holy Spirit walk with you in wisdom this day and always.