

Isa. 64:1–9

Ps. 80:1–7, 17–19

1 Cor. 1:3–9

Mark 13:24–37

Faith in Community

Goal for the Session *Youth will claim their place among the Spirit-filled community that awaits Christ's coming.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” E. Elizabeth Johnson

The letter's thanksgiving (1:4–9) telegraphs to readers at the outset the basic concerns of the writer. In this case, Paul's concerns are several related issues pertaining to the welfare of the house churches in Corinth: their charismatic giftedness (vv. 4, 7), their wealth—particularly but not only in terms of speech and knowledge (v. 5), the revelation of Christ in glory on the Day of the Lord (vv. 7, 8), and the faithfulness of the God who has called them (v. 9). Each of these subjects recurs throughout 1 Corinthians.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Carlos F. Cardoza-Orandi

This text points to one of the unique characteristics of the Christian religion: the intimate relationship between God and the Christian community that God bestows in and through Jesus Christ. Christianity gives witness to an intimate relationship among God, creation, and, in particular, the Christian community. This relationship is contextual: in other words, it takes its life and its shape from the particular terms of people's cultures. Hence, Jesus is our brother, our Lord, our ancestor, our beloved one, our enlightened spirit. Paul reasserts that the Christian community will be sustained in this spiritual continuum for one crucial reason: “God is faithful” (v. 9).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Martin B. Copenhaver

Paul proceeds to bless the Corinthian congregation. He has some urgent matters to take up with them, but those can wait for a time. Instead, Paul begins by offering a gift of blessing. It is an offering that, in itself, reminds his readers of the bonds they share. This passage invites us to offer thanks to God, not for material gifts, but for spiritual gifts found in the church. It might also serve as a reminder that the gathered body, the body of Christ, is itself intended to be a feast of abundance laid out for the sake of the world.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Charles L. Campbell

The grace of Jesus Christ, which is the source of the community's faith and life, undercuts all divisions in the community based on human accomplishments or status. Grace here has radical social implications; it is not simply a word spoken to individuals or a power at work in individuals. Grace creates a new kind of community. Paul invites the Corinthian church—and the contemporary church—to become an odd, new people in the context of a culture divided between superior and inferior, honored and shamed, insider and outsider. The grace of Jesus Christ is the source of that new kind of community.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Focus on Your Teaching

With increasing numbers, people in our culture are leaving organized religion, claiming that they can “do faith” without the hassles and problems of a faith community. Seeing the church as hypocritical and judgmental, some believers create their own system of religion without the benefit of living into community. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul asserts that the only way that Christians can truly wait for the revelation of Christ is in community. We are called into a fellowship of a forgiving and loving community where our spiritual gifts are revealed and utilized. This is good news for adolescents, who often find their identity in groups. It is in the church where youth can identify and respond to their calling.

Wonderful God, guide me as I begin this Advent journey. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- newsprint and marker
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- Advent wreath with 4 candles
- matches or lighter

For Responding

- option 1: index cards and pens
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, felt, craft glue, decorative cord, wooden dowel
- option 3: copies of a spiritual gifts inventory, pens

For Film Connection

- Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

As participants arrive, invite them to call out the various groups to which they belong. These could include formal groups (such as extracurricular activities) and informal groups (such as friends or family). Once all participants have arrived, form pairs of participants and give each group a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (Memes). Have each pair select their top three favorite memes from the ones listed on the page. After a few minutes, determine the group’s overall favorite meme by having each pair vote on their favorite one.

Ask each pair to create three or four social networking site group names that might be started as a result of being a member of your faith community. Possible social networking site group names might stem from people who relate to the following:

- ✿ I like the pastor’s sermons, but I still can’t pay attention for that long.
- ✿ I wish our ushers looked and sounded more like Usher.
- ✿ My favorite church game is dodge the greeter.
- ✿ I secretly wish for chocolate chip cookies as the communion bread.
- ✿ Sunday school isn’t like school.

List all the newly created group names on a sheet of newsprint, and have the participants vote to determine their favorite one. Explore these questions:

- ✿ Which groups to which you belong are life-giving? In what ways do these groups teach you about life and help you grow as a person?
- ✿ If you had to belong to only one group or community, to which would you cling? How much of your identity is wrapped up in what that group is about?

If you have more than five participants in your class, paraphrase 1 Corinthians 1:3–9 in groups and then combine all of the groups' work into one paraphrase.

Pray:

God of everyone and everything, thank you for the groups in our lives and the people who belong to each group. May our group gathered here today be your community as we open your holy Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–2. Ask: What do these two verses tell us about the book of 1 Corinthians? Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–9.

Explore these questions:

- ✧ How would you feel if someone said to you, “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus”?
- ✧ In what specific ways did Paul believe that the Christian community in Corinth was blessed?
- ✧ What does it mean to be “called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ”? In what way is Jesus calling this Sunday school class, this community of friends?
- ✧ Paul called for the believers to “wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” not as individuals, but as a community. Why might it be best to wait for Christ’s revelation together?

On a sheet of newsprint, lead the participants in paraphrasing this passage by rewriting each verse in contemporary language.

Invite the participants to skim through the rest of the chapters in 1 Corinthians, calling out some of the topics (section headings) that Paul addresses with the Christian community in Corinth. Ask: Given all of the significant topics that Paul covers with the Corinthians, why do you think he began his letter to the Corinthians by reminding them of their blessing as a community?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Excerpts) and read the “Theological Perspective” excerpt together. Discuss:

- ✧ What words could be used to describe the intimate relationship among God, creation, and the Christian community?
- ✧ How does your current culture shape your relationship with God?

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

1. **Stranded on an Island** Give each participant an index card and pen. Ask the participants to imagine that they are about to be whisked away to a deserted island where they will be stranded for an unknown period of time. Without discussing anything with the rest of their group, ask each participant to write on his or her index card an object he or she would like to take along to the island. Give each person an opportunity to reveal and explain his or her particular object.

EASY
PREP

Invite participants to find ways to improve their chances of survival by combining their various objects. Objects may be important, but if no one knows how to use them, they aren't much use. Ask: What are the unique gifts that you bring to this community of faith? How would our community be diminished without that gift?

If possible, display the banner for your congregation to enjoy. Consider using the banner in an upcoming worship service.

- 2. Banner Making** Read together the "Homiletical Perspective" excerpt from Resource Sheet 2 (Excerpts). Have participants work together to create a banner that depicts the new kind of community that is created by God's grace. Cut the banner shape from a large piece of felt. Fold over and glue the top three inches of the felt to create a loop for a dowel rod to hang the banner. Have participants use shapes cut from felt, decorative cord, and other materials to create the design of the banner. When the banner is finished, gather around it and ask: How do you fit into this new community?

Spiritual gift inventories can be found through an Internet search. Use *spiritual gifts inventory download* as search words.

- 3. Your Place in the Community** Give each participant a copy of a spiritual gifts inventory and a pen. Have participants complete the inventory to discover their spiritual gifts. Ask: In what ways do your spiritual gifts connect with the needs of your spirit-filled faith community?

CLOSING

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath, and invite a volunteer to light the first candle. Remark that this is the First Sunday of Advent, the season of preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth. Discuss:

- ✠ How is this community of believers a blessing to you?
- ✠ In what ways might this community of believers be a blessing to the world as we prepare for Christmas?

Close in prayer. Extinguish the candle.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

In the film *Chocolat* (2000; PG-13), a single mother and her young daughter open an uncommon chocolate shop directly across the street from a church in a peaceful French village during the height of Lent. If your church has a viewing license, show the scene toward the end of the film in which the young priest, who has been bullied into fighting against the chocolate shop, delivers an Easter sermon (bit.ly/FOWChocolatSermon). Discuss:

- ✠ What is the message of the sermon?
- ✠ How does the sermon's message connect with 1 Corinthians 1:3–9?

Memes



When I was little, I liked building forts out of pillows and blankets.



No offense basically means: "I'm going to insult you, but don't get mad."



I get off the computer because I'm bored. Five minutes later, I'm back on.



Don't complain about grading 140 essays over the weekend; you assigned it.



I don't really have to go to the bathroom; I just want to get out of class.



No, it wasn't awkward until you said, "This is awkward." Now it's awkward.



"BECAUSE I'M THE PARENT" really isn't a logical explanation for ANYTHING.



I'm the girl. You're the boy. You text me first if you want to talk to me at all today.



When I was younger, I put my face close to the fan to hear my robot voice.



Honestly, I write "LOL" and I'm not even laughing.



I need to stop becoming a fan for every fan page that relates to me.



How is Mr. Krab's daughter a whale?



Yes, I do have gum. No, you can't have any.

Excerpts

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