**Trustworthy Stewards!**

**1 Corinthians 4:1-5**

Gaudete – 3rd Sunday in Advent

12.11.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Were you paying attention to our readings today? John, Jesus' cousin, sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the one who is to come or if they should be looking for another. In a way you can understand his concern, probably on two levels.

First, John has been prophesying that Jesus ***is* the Christ**, He who all the prophets foretold was going to come. John is also in sinful flesh, his situation in prison weighs heavy on his mind - it looks grim. God’s messengers cannot speak God's truth about people's sexual practices without making them angry. John had made Herod's new wife angry because he spoke about their adultery – that he had taken his brother’s wife as his own – John was preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It is possible that he is hoping Jesus is the one to come and set up an earthly Kingdom, and maybe get him out of prison?

Of course, as we already said, John is God's prophet – he is trustworthy. He is pointing his own disciples to where they need to be focused, not on himself, but on God's Christ – Jesus.

I do not know about you, but I do enjoy Steve Harvey, and usually chuckle at Family Feud. I must admit I was very sad the other night when I was watching. One question almost brought me to tears. One hundred people were asked, with top six answers on the board, “What's the best thing about Christmas?” The first to press the buzzer answered, “Jesus.” Steve Harvey turned to the board and said, “Our Lord and Savior.”

One of the tiles did flip over. That's when I got sad. It was the third tile. Only 11 people out of 100 said that Jesus is the most important thing about Christmas. Without Jesus, God's Christ, there would be no Christmas.

23 people responded with presents. And the number one answer was friends and family, with 30-some points. At that point, I wasn't paying 100% attention.

I had grabbed my phone to ask Google, “what is the best thing about Christmas?” According to Google’s invasion of the privacy of everyone’s life, it had tabulated the Seven Best Things About Christmas Day

1. Opening presents. ...

2. The fun of seeing what everyone else got! ...

3. Eating Christmas dinner. ...

4. The brilliant TV films! ...

5. Munching on chocolate all afternoon. ...

6. Flaking out for the afternoon with nothing to do! ...

7. Playing charades/cards/Monopoly with your family.

I was seriously saddened. I want to say that if you don't want Jesus in your Christmas, then you shouldn't get any Christmas at all.

There are many people who go out of their way to say, “Merry Christmas!” But I wonder if they all do it with joy in their heart, in their voice, and on their faces? I know some do it harboring an attitude of, “I dare you to try and take away my right to say, ‘Merry CHRISTmas!’” In their vehemence to confess Christ, they fail to exhibit any of the joy and peace of Christ?

Something else that is fairly sad are those who will defend their right to say, “Merry Christmas,” put on their pious airs about Christ being the “reason for the season,” but… They will get to church once for Christmas – probably Christmas Eve. And once they get their Jesus thing done, they completely shift gears. Then it is all about the presents, food, and family fun. How many will rejoice in the birth of their Savior by talking about God’s gift of Christ in their conversations with family over the Christmas break? I wonder how many will make both services with Christmas Eve on Saturday, and Christmas Day falling on a Sunday this year?

How many will be disappointed if the pastor makes big deal at Christmas about Christ! Shame on the pastor if he talks about the Baby born as God’s gift realized only in His crucifixion – instead of just talking about The Baby being born. How many think the pastor should not pull a John the Baptizer moment for Christmas – preaching a baptism of repentance of the forgiveness of sins – and speaking of that Child as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

In our text, Paul’s epistle lesson, he has just changed gears from the preceding chapter where he was talking about the congregation to speaking about those who are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Those whom God calls to be servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries are called to be trustworthy. Some translations use the word faithful in place of trustworthy. Stewards are trustworthy to the One who has given them their stewardship. They are to be faithful to the One who has appointed them. Christ calls them as His servants and gives to them the stewardship of His mysteries.

The mysteries of God are the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul begins this letter to the Corinthians calling the crucifixion of Christ a mystery. Paul closes this epistle declaring that the resurrection of all believers with Christ is a mystery.

Christianity is a mystery for God does all the work of man’s salvation. God does what is necessary to make peace with man, despite man’s continued disobedience. That God would do such for sinners is a mystery.

Christmas is one of those mysteries. Why would God take on human flesh, leave His heavenly kingdom and deny Himself the full use of His divine power? A mystery!

Why would Jesus allow Himself to be abused, suffer, and die on the cross to take away the sin of the world? A mystery!

How could He be raised to life three days later? A mystery!

How is it that we are joined to His death and resurrection in baptism? How can a man speak a word of forgiveness and it be valid and certain before God in heaven? What does it mean that we eat of His body and drink of His blood, and in so doing receive forgiveness of sins in the meal which He places before us? All these things are mysteries.

These are the things Christ has made His servants to be stewards of, and these things they will be held accountable before God as trustworthy of – or not!

Unfortunately, many do not see any use in these mysteries. People want pastors who will do something more than be stewards of the mysteries. Many want their pastor to build their self-esteem. Others want him to help bring law and order to our increasingly ungodly nation. Many want a pastor who is going to be their buddy, do what we want him to do, and tell us what we want to hear. We want one who is going to be sensitive to our desires – for we know what is best for us.

In Corinth they had their favorite pastors. It was like a popularity contest. How often does that happen today? And what are the reasons for following a particular pastor? Because he is doing what we want?

John the baptizer pointed to Christ, a trustworthy steward of the mysteries of God – and for it he was beheaded. Paul was a trustworthy steward – and for that, five times he received 40 lashes less one, three times he was beaten with rods, and once he was stoned. He said to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul daily bore the cross of proclaiming the truth of Christ. He was determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He did not try and persuade with eloquent speech or fine sounding words but was trustworthy in proclaiming in a simple manner the message of Christ – foolishness to Gentiles and a stumbling block to Jews – but to those who are being saved, Christ crucified cross is the wisdom of God.

How often do we want God – and His stewards – to give us what we want rather than what God in His infinite wisdom knows we need. We want pastors to give us the answers to every tragedy and tell us where God was. Tragedies are evidence of the sadness that sinfulness brings into the world. It is the cure for sinfulness that Christ came into His creation in our flesh – to endure the tragedy of death upon a cross as the Innocent One.

We are approaching the annual celebration of the first Advent of God’s Christ. Christmas is a time of hope in the midst of the sadness that is life in this world. A star led the magi to the Christ Child. Christ is evidence that God does understand how sin brings about death in some of the most, vile ways.

Look to the mystery of the manger where God took on human flesh, and then ultimately suffered and died. The Gospel is not just a story ***about*** Jesus dying for us. The Gospel delivers what the perfect life of Jesus, sacrificed upon the cross, purchased. The Gospel gives you the forgiveness of sins and makes you righteous before God. It builds you up in the hope of life eternal in perfected flesh freed form the pain caused by sinfulness. God takes your sins, your failures, your mess, and cleanses it in the blood Christ shed in His obedient suffering and death – unto the forgiveness of your sins.

I wish that I could step into your lives and solve all your problems. I wish that I could dry all your tears, take away all your pain, and give you a recipe for a life that is perfect and happy.

In my sinfulness, I would only make a bigger mess of things in your life. In fact, all the problems in your life and mine, all our tears, all our pain, all our sorrows are by-products of the sinfulness that infects us all.

Christ has already done away with all that. It is a mystery! Here it is! On Christmas, you rejoice that what is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger is your Savior. This same Jesus Christ, on the last day, when He returns and raises you from the dead, will reveal all that is now hidden as join your Him in His eternal kingdom.

Let me declare to you what has been entrusted to me. You may think you are not yet there – but you are! You already are baptized into Christ’s death ***AND*** His resurrection. You already join Him at His table – with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven – and at His table He feeds you His body and gives you to drink of the blood He shed upon to cross to forgive you and grant you new life.

In the mystery of the Gospel, Christ Himself sustains you in this life, even as He prepares you unto life everlasting.

Gaudete! Rejoice in the Lord – always! Amen.