

As those of you who are regularly here for Evening Prayer on Wednesdays may remember that on July 22nd, just two weeks, ago we had a reading from the 1st chapter of 2nd Corinthians. I spent some time that evening talking about St. Paul. I won't go into the same detail this evening, but there are some things about Paul that are critical to realize if one is to understand this evening's passage. Firstly, contrary to what many think and say, Paul was not a convert to Christianity, he received a call directly from Jesus on the road to Damascus to become his apostle to the Gentiles. The key thing to know is that Paul saw Jesus as the Messiah and the fulfillment of all the promises of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scripture. Jesus was not an alternative to Judaism or a repudiation of Judaism. To Paul, Jesus was its fulfillment. Secondly, it is also important to remember that Paul's letters are the earliest of the Christian scriptures. Paul was hanged in Rome between the years 64 and 67. The first Gospel, that of Mark, was written in the late 60's. Both letters to the Corinthians were written around the year 55.

All of Paul's letters were written to address issues in the largely Gentile Churches, but note that many Followers of the Way both Jewish and Gentile were still attached to synagogues. The final break between Church and Synagogue really only accelerated in the 80's. It was into the second century before Judaism and Christianity were completely regarded as separate religions.

Paul begins chapter 3 of his letter asserting that he needs no letters of recommendation because the very believers to whom he is writing are those letters of recommendation written not in ink, but by the Spirit in the heart of those very believers. In other words the fact that there are believers in Corinth is a testimony to Paul's genuine call to be an Apostle to the Gentiles and the Spirit's work through him.

In the 7th and 18th verses Paul asserts that Jesus has opened up direct access to God with no need of a curtain in the Temple to veil the Holy of Holies nor of a veil to dim the glory of a patriarch like Moses who has seen the Lord. Never forget that another word for revelation is unveiling. It was, indeed, only about 15 years later that the Temple and its curtain were completely destroyed by the Roman Empire.

I could say much more about this passage, but time is limited. Our normal roughly 30-minute service has had three hymns added. So I must keep this homily brief. Suffice it to say, the questions we might each ask ourselves are, am I a letter of recommendation for what the Spirit has written in my heart in all that I do? Do my thoughts, utterances, and actions speak of what the Spirit has written in my heart?

I cannot quite yet yield the floor. In a post-holocaust world one cannot in good conscience deal with passages that speak of the old and the new covenant without saying that the old covenant

was in no way superseded by the new. I am an old man; there are lots of new men. We can, and we do co-exist. Jesus working in part through Paul opened a relationship for Gentiles with the God of Israel. That relationship did not supersede the multiple millennia relationship that already existed between God and the Jews. And let us be clear, the Jews did not kill Jesus. The church has generations of atonement to accomplish for its practices of supersessionism and antisemitism over two millennia. Only when we are confident that we have purged ourselves and our church of antisemitism will we be able to support our Palestinian brothers and sisters and deplore the actions of the Israeli government in the West Bank and Gaza. Those actions are not the actions of Judaism any more than the multiple church led pogroms against Jews were reflections of the will of the Christ. Empire and its servants killed Jesus. Empire and its servants are still altogether ready to pervert and destroy actions towards God's peace.

Last Sunday in my homily, I said then that we no longer live so much with empires of territory and occupation; we now live with empires of money. Those empires of money, just as much as former empires, if not more so, ensure that God's abundance is unjustly distributed and are just as antithetical to God's design for creation. One way to reveal what the Spirit has written in our hearts is to resist those empires. Amen