

1 Corinthians 1:1-9e

Not Lacking

You've Got Mail! Yes, it is an old reference to a 1998 movie starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. The two are business rivals but unwittingly end up corresponding by email. This in a time when email was becoming common place for individuals. Yet it resonated with viewers. Email was still new enough that this movie's title was attractive.

I remember when getting a letter in the mail meant that something special had arrived. Getting a blue specially folded airmail from my Oma who lived in the Netherlands always piqued my interest, even if my mom had to translate every word and the letter was for my parents and not addressed to me. Even more so now, it is pretty special when the mailbox outside my front door has something other than flyers. I used to say bills, but now the majority of my bills come through my email.

Now if this was and is special for us, think of what it would have meant for those in the first century after Jesus' death to receive a hand written letter from their mentor, the one who established their community of faith. It didn't matter that it was addressed to everyone, just like it didn't matter to me when the letter from the Netherlands was not specifically addressed to me, the words, "you've got mail!" would resonate throughout the church in Corinth, especially when it came from the Apostle Paul.

What we are getting with the verses of this reading is the opening of the letter from Paul to all of those who made up the church in Corinth. We get to hear the part that is all about letting the people know that they are gifted with what they need to be the church. Those gifts are what they need locally, but these gifts and the people themselves are part of a bigger picture of churches who love and serve the Lord.

When the word "serve" is used, it is not meant to be heard as being one who is subservient out of fear and because of the power of one over another. Christians serve God who is loving, abundant in grace and forgiveness, and who desires that abundance of love, hope, peace, and grace for every human being.

These opening words of the letter are important as they set the stage for what is to come later in the letter. Turns out this group called the church in Corinth was anything but cohesive. They were divided into factions, some following one leader, others following another, each claiming to have a corner on the right way to be a Christian. They boasted of the spiritual gifts they had as individuals. They saw some gifts as more important, which meant some people were seen as more knowledgeable or important.

They lived in a community that was prosperous, even if all of them were not. Henrietta Mears in her book *What the Bible is all About* describes Corinth this way,

Corinth was the most important city of all Greece in Paul's day. Its wealth was fabulous. Men spent their days in tournaments and speeches. Luxury, dissipation, and public immorality were rampant among this great industrial and seafaring population. Corinth attracted great crowds of foreigners from the East and West. Their gods were gods of pleasure and lust. There was, besides, much culture and art. The city abounded in studios of language and schools of philosophy.¹

It was a city of temptations, power, influence, money, and culture. It was in this city that Paul spent a year and a half working as a tent maker and sharing the gospel of Christ, establishing a community of faith throughout the city. His message was counter cultural. It was a message about community and care, compassion and grace based in the peace of Christ Jesus. It was a community founded in the saving grace of God in a place where all around screamed of individualism and the prospering of those with means. In many ways it sounds much like the world we live in today with its consumerism and self-centered focus.

People in this community of faith were letting the city and its culture influence the way they behaved in the church. They began thinking in terms of politics and power, influence and affluence. They saw the gifts of the Holy Spirit that they had as gifts they themselves brought, forgetting that their gifts came from God to be used for the people of God and the world. They had lost their focus on Christ and their work to reveal Christ to the world by their words and actions.

To this we bring the question, so what does that mean for us? We don't tend to boast of our God given gifts, in fact we often see ourselves and our churches as lacking in the spiritual gifts. The opposite of what was going on in the Corinthian church, we don't see ourselves as a church with influence or standing in the community, we know that Christianity has lost ground in its meaningfulness to those outside of the church. Christianity appears to many as an outdated, even ridiculous waste of time.

Where the Corinthian community was assured by Paul that that there were not lacking in any spiritual gift, we feel like we are empty, we don't often even know how to identify our spiritual gifts. Yet, Paul's words are for us as well. Be assured we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. We have within our church the gifts needed to be the church in the world today.

It is important to discern what you as an individual bring to the work of God that reveals Christ to the world, just as it is important for each church to determine what we bring to

¹ Mears, Henrietta C. *What the Bible is All About*. Regal Books – GL Publications. Ventura, CA. 1983. P444.

the community that will reveal Christ to the world in ways that speak to the grace, love, peace, and justice for the most vulnerable of the world, the people and the environment.

We are not lacking in any spiritual gift. In fact, we are not lacking. So often we come to things with a mind set of scarcity. We don't have enough money. We don't have enough people. We don't have enough energy or passion. And in some cases for congregations they must determine whether or not it is time to end their ministry as it has been and bring all that they are as individuals or as a group into the midst of another Christian community. There can be life cycles, we are human.

Yet often it is that we just don't recognize what we have. We have not yet determined or discerned how God is working in our midst and is ready to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we already have to make a difference for Christ and for people.

When we partake of the bread and the wine in communion, the words often spoken as the bread and wine (or juice) are presented to the people are "the gifts of God for the people of God". And that is what all of our gifts are, gifts of God for the people of God.

We have spiritual gifts, gifts of potential and possibility. Gifts of hope, peace, joy, grace, forgiveness, and above all love. We have gifts for teaching, healing, encouraging, helping, and supporting. Each are gifts of God for the people of God. Gifts for ourselves and for our church, to be used in community and for community, both inside the walls of our church and more importantly for those outside the church.

What we do have in common with those of long ago Corinth is that we live in a time of factions, where one person or group will think that they have the corner on right, they know what is best, they have the power and influence. It is in our church and it is in our communities, the nation, and our global community. It is to this we are called to be the kind of community of faith that finds ways to work together with Christ as the head and lead even when we don't see eye to eye. This is truly counter-cultural!

Taking our gifts and not saying "because I bring this to the table" or "I know this to be true, this is how things must be or I will just walk away." Of course, there are times to walk away, but it is important to do it from a point where one asks the question, "where is God in this?" We don't walk away or take a stand just because we think we are right and others are wrong.

Rather we become a curious community together. Curious about what others have to offer, what and who we can be in a way that brings people...especially the most vulnerable, those most on the margin... and bring them hope and love with an abundance of grace for them and each other.

We are not lacking. In fact we have the gifts of the Spirit necessary to be the people of God in the world today. God has equipped us for our own time to be the people of God in the world.

May you continually seek how God is using you in the church, in your family, with your friends and co-workers, and in community with other people to be the people of God bringing the gifts of God into the world.

We have God's abundance, an abundance of hope, joy, love, passion, and energy. We are not lacking. We are the people of God revealing Jesus to the world until he comes again. Thanks be to God!