

Kingdom Building Requires Kingdom Living

1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as fleshly, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still fleshly. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not fleshly and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not all too human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labor. For we are God’s coworkers, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.

If we were to ask you the question: *if you could change one thing in our Winston Salem community right now, what would it be?* Providing schools with equitable resources for all children? Or fare and affordable housing? What about gun violence? All powerful and impactful things our community desperately needs. Now wonder what does it take? More, wonder why it doesn’t happen?

At the outset, we ponder the question: why it is so difficult to get things done? If we are honest, maybe we confess we are all so busy with our own lives, it really is challenging to go to school board meetings scheduled during the dinner hour, or community forums after an already long day. Maybe. Or perhaps there are so many complexities and layers that we honestly don’t know where to begin? Or perhaps the bigger part of the problem is that the way our systems are designed—whether it be urban planning or housing, or even our political structure—they are designed to keep us at divided. Why? Because our division makes rich people richer. Our cancelling one another keeps powerful people in power. Even within our own liberal ideologies we somehow find ways to divide over who is more “woke” or “politically correct.” Perhaps it is difficult to get things done because division is the name of the game. It’s how the system is designed.

So St. Paul writes a letter to a multicultural church who finds themselves at odds. He calls them infants and of the flesh and he says they need to grow up and be of the Spirit. And then he gets to the root of the problem. Their division, he says, is because of their rivalry. They are taking sides over whose leadership they prefer. Who they “belong to.” Notice the language of belonging. It’s deeper than whose preaching style they liked more. It’s about who they belong to or identify with. Some are on team Paul—the Jewish leader who makes the Jewish folk feel more at home. Others are on team Apollo—the Greek leader who knows the Greek side of things. And the rivalry has gotten to the dangerous point where people’s identities are based on what leader they identify with. (Thankfully, that doesn’t happen anymore!) Remember a story about a pastor who was in a church for over 30 years. When he died unexpectedly many of the members left because they felt like they belonged to the pastor rather than to the church. We can see the problem. The

rivalry the church is snagged up in is keeping them from growing in understand who they really belong to.

So catch how he responds. He nips the problem in the butt by using a gardening metaphor. Someone plants. Someone else waters, but God gives the growth. You see, it's not about who is the leader. It's not about what group we identify with; it's about how we are living out God's kingdom together. We are all servants who build on what was done before us. The truth is, we have the relationship with Dellabrook because of the leadership back in the 1980's. We are open and affirming to LGBTQ friends because of the leaders of the 90's. Not one person is responsible for our growth. Rather it is God's Spirit—the electric pulse of resurrection hope flowing through us—that keeps us going and makes us who we are! Someone plants. Someone waters, but God gives the growth. Amen!

Except, here's the tricky part—if we are if we are going to build something together it is going to require as many hands-on deck as possible. It is going to also require that we are humble enough to confess we need other institutions and organizations to make God's kingdom of justice and peace a reality. Which also means we might not agree with everyone we are partnering with. We might not agree with their thinking, or they might not agree with our theology. But we will have things in common as we work for a common purpose together. Someone does the planting. Another does the watering. Someone else fertilizes. And in the process God grows us up as we discover that we need each other if God's kingdom is going to be realized. A friend once taught me what to say in situations where I found myself at odds with someone who triggered me. Just say, "I might not agree with you, but at the end of the day we need each other if we are going to make the world a better place." All the energy, all the gifts, all the resources we need to build the kingdom will require as many hands as possible.

So back to our list. Over the last several months we have been holding relational meetings with each other. We've learned things about each other. We've formed connections. We've grown an appreciation for our person. (Round two coming up soon by the way!) Have we not felt the energy buzz like drinking an espresso? Something is happening! Did you know that all [number] of institutions in the Multicultural Broad Based Organizing group we belong to has been doing the same thing? So on February 16—this Thursday at 6:30pm there is a meeting where we will hear from where other institutions are at with their relational meetings. Why? Because at the center of doing kingdom work is our relationships! The truth is, if we are going to make an impact on our list, we are going to have to get to know others from other institutions to make justice and peace a reality in our city.

In a moment we are going to take up offering. During offering, you are invited to bring your offerings forward and sign your name on the sheet if you are interested—and committed—to attending the meeting on February 16, at 6:30pm where we will be in the company of many institutions who have been conducting relational meetings just like we have. We will get to see who is at the table with us, committed to peace and justice in our city.

Kingdom building requires kingdom living. Someone plants, someone else waters. Now just watch as God gives the growth. Amen.