

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Text: *“for we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”* 1 Cor 3:9

What do you think makes a good leader?

Political leaders are much in the news at the moment. President, Prime Minister, or Premier are constantly under the microscope.

We ask: Does he smile a lot? Does she get things done? Is he our man? Is she good to people and good with people? Does he come from the right background? Will she be inspirational? Is he sincere? And so on.

Leadership among God’s people.

And every one among us will have different thoughts about what makes a good leader of God’s people.

For instance: We want them to be the opposite of the last one we had! We want them to be strong and tough, but good with people. We want them to be a good manager, but also an interesting preacher and someone who runs services well. We want them to have a home open to anyone but also spend more time visiting us.

The problems in the church in Corinth in Greece.

In our epistle reading for today we listened in to our apostle Paul warning his dear friends in the church in Corinth in Greece.

A certain bishop in another part of Australia once jokingly said that the job of an Archdeacon was to make the Bishop look good.

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Sadly this is what those friends of Paul in Corinth in Greece wanted more than anything else from their leaders. Someone to make them look good. They wanted to be famous as those who were led by Paul, or his close missionary friend Apollos or even the apostle Peter. And some even wanted to be one up on everybody else. They wanted to be famous as those who were led by Christ!

And Paul does not mince his words. *“You are being childish,”* he says. Listen to verses three and four:

“you are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?”

They had everything upside down. It was so sad, and a terrible demonstration of what not to do. On the outside this church of about 30 to 40 people was pretty impressive. When you went to church as a visitor you would be stunned by some of the spiritual things that went on. The wow factor was pretty big. God appeared to be doing great things among them. The joint seemed to be jumping.

But all this only made them proud, envious and divided. Above all they had forgotten and perhaps now despised love. (Which is why Paul writes that marvellous love poem in Chapter 13).

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Now, it's not as if they did not know what leadership among God's people should be like. They had experienced the best of it according to Acts Chapter 18 as Paul taught in the synagogue and then in homes for over 18 months. And they knew about the very best of it. For Paul had taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus who in speaking of his own leadership said in Luke chapter 22 *"the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;... But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves... I am among you as one who serves."*

And so it is that Paul reminds his friends and us of God's truth about leadership among God's people. He wants us to change our way of thinking about leaders to God's point of view. And as we will hear in the epistle readings for the next two weeks there are a number of very important points we need to get straight. The first two are here:

Firstly:

God is the one in charge.

Now that may sound so simple and elementary that you think it's extraordinary I should even mention it.

But listen to the apostle Paul in verse 5: *"what, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?"*

Only servants through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

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Notice that he says that he himself did not choose to become a Christian leader, but God the Lord assigned him this task. Notice that he says God is the one who gave the growth.

Now of course he is using the picture of a farmer planting and watering seed to speak about ministers and others telling people the message about Jesus. And even though humans are involved in that, it's God's work. God is the one in charge. He makes and keeps people as followers of Jesus. Ministers and others help us in all kinds of ways to learn and hear of Jesus. But it is God who is in charge. *We are God's fellow workers.*

You are God's field.

You are God's building.

The second point is this: Servants, not celebrities.

Ministers, priests, bishops, and others who speak the message of Jesus to people are servants not celebrities.

"What is Paul? What is any priest or minister or teacher of the message?"

Only servants. Only servants.

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Like a waiter in a restaurant, like a butler in government house, like a cleaner in a school, like a mechanic at the service station, like a barman in a pub, the focus is on their boss, not themselves. Yes, like the ministry of Jesus, what they do is important. But they are NOT the focus. They are only servants.

They are God's fellow workers, says Paul

you are his field, not ours

you are his building, not ours.

We are servants, ministers.

May it be so among us.