

We have reached the last Sunday in our sermon series: “Ship of Fools.” Two weeks ago I unpacked what I meant by the phrase “Ship of Fools.” The Church is filled with sinner-saints who don’t always do the right thing. The world around us ridicules the Church, but through Christ alone the Church is the beautiful bride of Christ, and we are called to the cross to receive forgiveness and life at Jesus’ feet.

Last week we talked about the role of the Holy Spirit which we nicknamed the Favorable Wind in guiding and empowering the Church. The image we utilized was a rowboat versus a sailboat. A rowboat is slower and requires more energy, but a sailboat is faster, effortless, the only catch is that we don’t choose which way the wind blows. As the Holy Spirit gets a hold of our lives, we find that sometimes we don’t always get to do what we want, but the result is way better than we could have ever imagined.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 3 we see open mutiny in the church in Corinth. Mutiny is when the sailors rebel against the captain in an effort to gain control of the boat. Focusing specifically on a local congregation, how does the Church avoid open mutiny?

First, 3. Knowledge of the enemy avoids open mutiny. We can often be naïve. We think everything is fine and there’s no need to attend to spiritual matters—the latest exam, the next doctor’s appointment, or the big game—those are the things that we need to concentrate on. There are many things in life that are important, but if we don’t take a moment to realize the spiritual war that is going on.

Paul likewise expresses his frustrations with the church in Corinth. He writes: **“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,”** He is calling the congregation in Corinth spiritual babies. Them’s fighting words!

No matter your level of spiritual maturity: real or perceived, the key to success on Christ’s ship that is the Church is knowing the enemy. The enemy is broadly: the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

The devil often works in the shadows. He is the master of deceit, subterfuge, and lies. His attacks are most effective when you don’t realize what he is doing. More Americans believe in the existence of a god than believe in the devil, and the devil is just fine with that. He can still pull the strings even if people aren’t worshipping him explicitly.

Paul teases this out in our text, he continues, **“for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?”** How easy is it

to make another person at church the enemy and fail to acknowledge the true enemy?

It is very true that other Christians can horribly mistreat each other. It is very true that Christians sin against each other, but we need to recognize in conflict that that person is not the enemy. In as far as he or she is sinning against you, they are knowingly or unknowingly, simply following the drumbeat of the devil. The devil is the true enemy.

The other enemy we need to be aware of is the world. It's not that everything that is not Christian is explicitly evil. Secular leaders and companies can have good ideas. However, we need to understand that just because the world around us is behaving in a certain way doesn't mean we have license to act the same way.

Just one small example: pray for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as we approach another national convention this summer. One key item of business that will be taken care of this spring is the election of our Church body's president. We live in a society where elections for government offices often have mudslinging campaigns to the point that you're voting against a candidate rather than voting for the candidate you want. The temptation of our church body would be to adopt mudslinging campaigns just like the world around us so we can elect the "right guy." Pray in this Church election season that we can act in a spiritual rather than fleshly way with one another.

Finally, the third enemy to know is your own sinful flesh. As the comic strip character Pogo famously quipped, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." 2. Knowledge of yourself avoids open mutiny.

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean all your problems go away. In fact, we often realize how sinful we are. Last month I went on a retreat for circuit visitors. I am serving in this capacity for a three year term until the summer of 2025. CVs often act as first responders to issues and conflict among the local LCMS circuits. It made sense then for an organization called Ambassadors of Reconciliation to present to us about how to work reconciliation in congregations.

One particular idea that stuck out to me was how destructive idols can be. We have this natural tendency to fear, love, or trust anything or anyone more than God. The trick is we can make good things into idols! For the Church in Corinth, that might have been a church leader like Apollos. For another congregation, it could be their day school or church sanctuary.

Take a scenario with a Christian day school, an ungodly desire for a Christian day school could lead to the demand it be kept open at all costs, when the school becomes financially unviable, there are unmet expectations which lead to frustrations which cause a school promoter to judge anyone who wants to close the

school, this judgment leads to them punishing those who disagree, with the end result being destruction or death.

In one such case study, the presenter said that in a congregation where there was a contentious vote to close the school, the next week the school supporters called a meeting at the church to close the congregation in retaliation!

Knowing our sinful tendencies is key to a reality check. Paul tries to put things back into perspective saying that people like him or Apollos are just servants, God is the important one.

There's another side to knowing yourself. We're not just rotten sinners. We are baptized children of God. When we forget this, then we devolve to following the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Paul talks about the factionalism in Corinth earlier in his letter. In chapter one he brings it back to baptism. No matter which pastor you may identify with, no matter what you think our congregation should look like, the starting point is that you have been baptized into Jesus Christ. Christian is who you are.

All throughout that training back in January, the presenter kept on taking it back to the importance of confession and absolution. As Christians, our job is to coach conflicted parties to see ways in which they contributed to mutiny, and then train them to forgive people when they confess their sins. James writes, **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”** There's no healing quite like hearing specific forgiveness for specific sins committed. That is how we live out our identities as baptized Christians, confessing to one another and forgiving one another. When we stop fighting among each other, Satan's war machine quickly drags to a stop.

Finally, 1. Knowledge of God brings harmony. All of this ties back to knowing God. And I'm not talking about an idle knowledge like jeopardy facts, but as we learn who the Triune God is, the Holy Spirit moves us to action.

God the Father has provided for us generously that we have all our physical needs met, and we are well equipped to hear His word, read, mark, and inwardly digest it.

God the Son has won the battle for us. He came. He saw. He conquered the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. He took on all your sins, so there's no need to be ashamed. His blood covers all your sins, and you can trust that your sins are completely removed from you. Your Jesus knows you perfectly, and there's nothing that will scare Him away, and there's no mistake He hasn't lovingly died and risen again for.

The Holy Spirit empowers you learn of God in the Bible and to live the forgiven life with one another. HARMONY IN THE CHURCH COMES FROM GOD TEACHINGS US THE ENEMY, OURSELVES, AND HIMSELF. We need not fear mutiny in the Church as we are united through faith in the Triune God.