

1 Sermon, January 19, 2014

Texts: 1 Corinthians 3:1-11, 1 Corinthians 4:1-8, Acts 18:24-19:7

Title: "The Story of the Love of God: Apollos"

1. There was divided loyalty within the church in Corinth.
2. It was already a global church – who was Apollos?
3. Apollos was someone God used to convert and teach
4. Apollos shows the blessing of being teachable
5. Paul was not jealous of Apollos – both servants

1. There was divided loyalty within the church in Corinth.

The church is made of people, and that was no different in the first century in Corinth. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, tells us that there were arguments among the people of the church, and different people declared their loyalty to one of several leaders.

Some said, "I'm for Paul."

Others said, "I believe in Cephas (that is, Peter)."

Others said, "I belong to Apollos."

Still others said, "I belong to Christ."

The people of the church at Corinth were divided according to which leader they placed their trust in. Paul had done the original missionary work that started their church. Apollos had come later and had inspired a number of people. Cephas may have never visited, but since he was one of Jesus' closest disciples, some wanted to place their loyalty in him. Maybe they had come from Palestine.

Finally, some would not place their trust in a human leader, but said they were for Christ.

What do you think you would have done had you been there? Would you have placed your trust in a human leader? Would you have stayed to the sidelines? Would you have left the church? Would have argued with others over who was right?

Paul writes the church at Corinth that these arguments are silly and destructive. Christ is not divided, and they should get along with each other. God was using Cephas *and* Apollos *and* Paul. God was behind them all, giving growth.

2. It was already a global church – who was Apollos?

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Now, you've heard of Paul, who wrote many of the letters in the New Testament. You've heard of Peter, Jesus' most vocal disciple. But you probably don't know much about Apollos.

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, in Egypt, who had come to preach in Corinth, in Greece. It's a distance of 612 miles across the Mediterranean Sea. Not exactly neighbors.

Many Jewish people had left Palestine and settled in other parts of the Roman empire. They even took non-Jewish names. Apollos is short for Apollonius, which means "dedicated to the god Apollo." It's an odd name for a Jew, who believed in the one God. It shows us the diversity within the ancient world.

It was already a global church. Apollos may have had darker skin and certainly a different accent than most people in Corinth. He was also probably quite well educated. Alexandria was a center for learning, and had a huge library with over half a million scrolls. It was the second largest city in the Roman empire.

Not only was Apollos an educated big-city man who came to a smaller town, he was educated in the *Old Testament*, knowing it well. So he was able to argue convincingly, using the stories and proverbs of the Old Testament.

If you had been there, you probably would have been impressed by Apollos.

3. Apollos was someone God used to convert and teach

The book of Acts tells us that Apollos knew a lot about Jesus, and what he knew was accurate. But his knowledge was incomplete. Apollos didn't understand that baptism in Jesus' name involved the Holy Spirit. Apollos understood baptism in the way that John the Baptist taught; it was a baptism of repentance from sin. Apollos thought Baptism was more about human resolution than God's grace.

Even with his incomplete understanding, God used Apollos. Apollos was an effective teacher, and taught a lot about Jesus. He drew crowds, he inspired loyalty, he drew people toward Jesus. Apollos' ministry was fruitful. Acts 18 tells us that he was "of great help to those who by grace had believed."

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Have you ever felt that you didn't know enough, and it stopped you from trying? Well, Apollos gives us the lesson that you don't have to know everything in order to be effective. You don't have to have your faith down perfect. All you have to do is love Jesus and let his light shine through you.

4. Apollos shows the blessing of being teachable

Paul's friends Priscilla and Aquilla had no problem working with Apollos. They found he was teachable, and once he learned a more complete picture of Jesus' baptism, began to teach with renewed fervor. There's a great blessing in being teachable. Apollos shows us that blessing.

5. Paul was not jealous of Apollos – both servants

Like Paul, Apollos travelled in order to teach about Jesus. He had been in Corinth, Ephesus, and Achaia. Being from Alexandria, he may have travelled farther than Paul, and Paul's journeys were epic. When he was in Ephesus, the Christians there wrote him a letter of introduction for the Corinthian church.

Probably the most important point that I can make about Apollos is that Paul, in writing of Apollos, didn't show even a touch of jealousy. Apollos was probably a better speaker than Paul; they were both quite intelligent. It would have been easy for them to be rivals.

Paul and Apollos traveled in the same mission circuit, but were very different people. Paul seemed to shine in writing, Apollos seemed to shine in public speaking. Apollos was probably cultivated and smooth, while Paul was a little rough on the outside.

Paul in his writing used many things: logical arguments, sarcasm, poetry, earnest pleading, blessings and analogies. Apollos may have used a kind of allegorical symbolism more like the book of Revelation, if he had been influenced by one of the greatest Jewish minds of Alexandria, a scholar named Philo.

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Even though they were quite different, Paul makes no suggestion that one was "right" and the other was "wrong." Instead, Paul insisted that each had brought something valuable to the Christian Community.

Paul says, "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 a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Paul says that both he and Apollos are "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries."

I think we can take that lesson to heart in several ways.

First, each of us is called to be a servant of Christ and a steward of God's mysteries. A steward is someone who takes care of something for someone else. We take care of God's mysteries on God's behalf.

We hold onto hope, because God is good.

We love, because God first loved us.

We are peacemakers, because peace is the way of Christ.

We understand that we are God's own, precious children of God, and that we have a message of good news to share with the world.

Second, we understand that, just as Paul and Apollos were servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries, we are *together* called to do God's work and will. None of us is perfect; none of us sees God's working perfectly; but we together create a whole that is bigger than its parts.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Paul writes: "Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing." Titus 3:13, NRSV.

"And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, 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 of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely 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

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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 a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:1-11, NRSV.

"Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. I have applied all this to **Apollos** and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!" 1 Corinthians 4:1-8, NRSV.

"Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus. While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them. ~~He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.~~" Acts 18:24-19:10, NRSV.