

STRONG IDENTITY – STRONG CHURCH



Scripture:

Isaiah 49:1-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me. ²He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. ³And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” ⁴But I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God.”

⁵And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—⁶he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

⁷Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (The Voice translation)

¹Paul, called out by God’s will to be an emissary for Jesus the Anointed, along with brother Sosthenes, ²to God’s church gathering in the city of Corinth. As people who are united with Jesus, the Anointed One, you have been set apart for service. You are all called into community to live as saints with all who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed

³I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, will shower you with grace and peace.

⁴I am continuously thanking my God for you when I think about the grace God has offered you in Jesus the Anointed. ⁵*In this grace*, God is enriching every aspect of your lives by gifting you with the right words to say and everything you need to know. ⁶In this way, your life story confirms the life story of the Anointed One, ⁷so you are not ill-equipped or slighted on any

necessary gifts as you patiently anticipate the day when our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, is revealed. ⁸Until that final day, He will preserve you; and on that day, He will consider you faultless. ⁹*Count on this:* God is faithful and in His faithfulness called you out into an intimate relationship with His Son, our Lord Jesus the Anointed.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



(This has been transcribed from an audio cassette tape made at the time Cassie Carroll preached the sermon on January 15, 2017.)

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(Tape sound began in mid-sentence.)....And you guys even gave me Christmas presents and you didn't even know who I was. I mean, that's pretty amazing! And this fancy tee-shirt that I'm wearing right here – it was pretty great. I have been overwhelmed by the amazing hospitality and generosity of this congregation, and I just want to say thank you. Thank you so much for welcoming me into this story, into this narrative of Santa Rosa, into the story of Church of the Roses.

MY INTRO

I recognize that I am entering into this story. This is like my intro. This story has been going on a long time, since before I got here, since 1952. (I read the time-line on the website.) It's amazing. I'm really entering into this time, but for you guys, this is what you know, this is your home, this is the place where you raised your children, this is the place where you saw your grandchildren walk around or roll maybe. But for me, this is the part in the script where it says, "Enter Cassie."

It's new and I have a lot to learn. I have a lot to listen to. It really wasn't that long ago that I was sitting in a circle with the Personnel Committee, and they said, "So what are you going to do here?" And I had to think and ask myself, "No, I have a lot of waiting to do. I have a lot of listening to do because this story is new to me.

PAUL'S LETTER TO CORINTH

Though it is my intro, I think it is very fitting that for my first sermon as a staff member, I'm reading the introduction to a letter. This is Paul's introduction to a letter in Corinth and similarly, he is recognizing that the story at Corinth has been happening a long time since the letter that he sent. He says he is thankful for them, meaning that he knows who they are. He has an idea of who they are and what they're up to over in Corinth and he recognizes that "Hey, I know that this letter is coming in at a particular time with particular things happening around you. I recognize that you might need to remember a couple of things."

He reminds them specifically of who they are, their identity; he reminds them of their character and he reminds them of God's faithfulness. In the second verse, right off the bat, he says that you are set apart for service; you are to live in community as saints.

Wow! You are set apart for service. You are to live in community as saints.

SPECIFIC WORK

There is a specific work that the church of Corinth does that is important and that God has particularly asked them to do. And

then it goes into their character; he reminds them that God has given them everything they need to know and all the words to say. He's saying, "These are the ways that you exist in the world, and by just existing in your community, I believe it is verse 5, it says, "Your life story confirms the life story of The Anointed one."

So this particular place, this particular time, the church of Corinth knows what they need to do, and knows what they need to say, and just by living their lives is honoring and embodying the story of Christ in their community. So they know who they are. They're the saints of the Lord, set aside to do their service, to do God's service and they are doing so by living their lives well and intentionally.

Then Paul goes on to remind them of what God has done for them and what God will continue to do for them.

God is going to provide you strength in whatever circumstance comes along. Until the very end, God will preserve you.

PARALLELS

I see a lot of parallels in this passage today with me and this intro into this community. We are set apart. Church of the Roses is set apart to be servants to Santa Rosa, to live in holy communion as saints and to share the Word of the Lord and the glory of Jesus Christ and the love of Jesus Christ to this neck of the woods specifically, in this particular time. And we are the only ones that can do it the way we do, the only ones that show the story of Christ the way that we can. We need the other churches around us because they do it really differently that we do. They show the love of God in ways that we can't, thank goodness.

So here we are – my intro into your story, and I want to remind you of who we are because it's now our story.

OFFICER TRAINING AT THE WOODS

I had the privilege of being at the officer's training yesterday at The Woods. I got to stretch them a little bit and asked them to play with crayons and do some prayer with coloring and remind us of who we are. The great thing is this identity, this character work, has already started. When Pastor Cindy got here three years ago, she started this church on a process of remembering who they are, and the phrase, reaching out with nurturing love to all God's people became an identity piece of our church, a centering phrase that guides us as we move throughout this world.

So, we did some prayer of coloring around this phrase, and the words that came out, and it helped us start to think of "Who do we serve in this community?" I convinced them to take a few pictures for me and I made a short little slide show that I would like to play right now. (It showed some of our church officers holding pictures indicating many of the ways that Church of the Roses works within our church and within our community.) And so much more! We serve this community well.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

I have been asked a number of times since I got here, "What do we need to do differently? How do we need to change? We have to make a difference because everything is different outside these walls and I don't know what to do."

I'm here to remind you that we are a church that serves Santa Rosa well, and we do it through serving the high school breakfast every morning. We serve this community by intentionally reaching out to veterans, through going and seeking out our homebound community that can't be here

with us but wishes they could be. And so many more ways - (I really like that choir picture!) – so many more ways.

THIS NEW CHAPTER

Our challenge, though, as we step into this new chapter, is to not remain complacent. Our challenge is to remember and hold onto and hold firm the goodness of our church, of who we are, the way we reach out and the way that our health ministry and community works. I think that's amazing. The fact that we talk about death in this church – that doesn't happen in many places. We serve a very specific group of people in a beautiful way, but we can't remain complacent. We have to listen to where the Holy Spirit is leading us next.

So that's our challenge. I don't have the answer right away. I still have a lot of listening to do. I think *we* still have a lot of listening to do. But we have to ask ourselves, "Who are we? Who do we serve? Who do we want to be and who do we want to serve?"

I said it already and I'll say it again, we are good. This church is good and we serve this community well. How do we continue to serve this community intentionally? We have everything we need: the strength of God, we know what we need to say, and we know what we need to do.

So let us do that well, let us hold on to the identity of who we are, know that our character speaks the love of Christ whether we like it or not. And let us continue to seek out what it means to serve Santa Rosa with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds. Amen



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