

Sermon 1 Corinthians 3 1 9 6th Sunday after Epiphany Series A

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Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (vv.5-9)

Theme: Equipping God's People (5th FELSISA Core Value)

Goal: To equip God's people to serve Him and to serve our fellows

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We are going through FELSISA's Core Values during this Epiphany Season. We discussed four of them on the previous Sundays, now we have arrived at the Fifth Core Value, which is "Equipping God's People". For those who missed this sequence of sermons I recommend to carefully read the booklet available to all families and to visit St. Thomas website to read the sermons of this series.

When someone gets a task, he must be equipped to accomplish that task. If you want to run the Cape Argus Cycle race, you have to have a bicycle and need to practice a lot! And so it's with all kinds of sports. – If you want to cook a good supper, you need to have the necessary equipment and the ingredients, and you have to try the recipe in advance before you invite your guests. – We were all prepared and trained to be a professional in our areas, and we know that we constantly need to refresh our knowledge and be equipped to use the new technology and resources which are available. If we don't do it, we will be in disadvantaged over against the concurrence.

Something similar happens in God's Kingdom. We were called by God's grace to be His children by faith in Jesus. As members of His family, we cannot just enjoy our status in laziness, but God wants us to be active in His Kingdom as His co-workers in His great mission to reach all people with the Gospel!

Our Core Values booklet says: *We believe that Christ did not only call people into a relationship with God, but also called them to be disciples who grow to maturity and are able to disciple others. All children of God therefore need to be equipped for the ministry. This we do diligently through the teaching of God's Word always with the purpose to reach out and to share the Gospel of Christ with others.*

I – The Church is God's field

The Apostle Paul uses the image of a farmer and a field to illustrate our relationship in the Kingdom of God. "You are God's field" he wrote.

Jesus told several parables using the same image. It is at the same time a privilege as a responsibility to be field of the Lord. Our owner is a good one, who takes care of His field in a very special way. The good seed of the Gospel which was sown in our hearts doesn't lack the sunshine or rain to grow. God is gracious and He pours out His blessings abundantly upon His field to harvest a good crop. We don't lack His Word and the Sacraments to water and to fertilize our faith and our lives. His eyes are always open upon us to prevent plagues or keep away enemies who want to damage the field. And He is faithful, collecting the crop to His barns when the time of harvest comes. We belong to Him from the very first day He planted the good seed to the time of the harvest; and then forever.

II – The Ministers are God's farmers

God doesn't work alone in His farm. He has His "fellow workers", as Paul calls himself and the ministers of the Word.

The issue in Corinth was division among the members of the church because one member liked one pastor more than the other. There were two main groups following either Paul or Apollos. Paul didn't

take advantage of this situation to promote himself. Rather, he showed the foolishness of that division and pointed to the role of each one in God's church, in God's farm. Let's read the text again: "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 has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field..."

Pastors have different gifts. No one is equal. And this comes from God as well. We read in Ephesians 4:11-12: "It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare (to equip) God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Each gift of God is given to improve the field in its various stages.

- Children, young plants, need special attention, because they are very fragile. We cannot expect them to have the same interest at the Service as adults. Therefore they have their special Service at the Sunday School, where they learn the Bible truth according to their capacity. The Sunday School is like the "nursery" in a field. – Youth, growing plants, need special care as well. It's very easy to grow weed around them. They need to be protected and prevented against weed. As the weed grows, it damages the roots. It's necessary to take the weed out and to strengthen the plant. – Adults, mature plants, when well-watered with the Word and the Sacrament, grow strong and produce fruits to be shared with others. These are our good deeds. Therefore it is so important that we all regularly receive the Water of Life to grow strong and to produce lot of fruits

Paul was concerned in our text about some Christians in the Church of Corinth, because they were still “infants in Christ” and had not grown in their faith and in their behaviour. The normal rhythm at a field is the planting time, the growing time, and the harvest time. God gives good condition to His field to grow well and sends His “fellow workers” to take care of His field.

Conclusion: God equips ministers and His people to do His good will. His good and gracious will is to save everyone. He equips us to share the Gospel with others by words and deeds. His will is also that we love our neighbours. Many opportunities to serve are around us in our family, among our fellows, in the church and among the needy. We will never ‘graduate’ as Christians, but it is an endless training, learning and equipping. We cannot give up and enter ‘retirement’ as Christians. As our experience grows, we have more to share with the younger generation and with our mates of the same age.

Visiting regularly an Old Age Home many years ago, I used to gather the elderly in the hall for songs and devotion. One of the faithful ladies, in her 90s, was not able to come one day because she was very weak. I visited her in her room. She was reading a New Testament English – Portuguese. I said to her: I didn’t realize that you know English... She answered: I don’t know... I’m learning...

Equipping, training, teaching, learning, practicing, growing, sharing... Therefore we have the Services, the Bible Study, the Meditation booklet with daily devotions, Sunday School Teachers Workshops, literature... and the pastor is always available for counselling and for help with questions about the Bible and the Christian life to equip everyone.

When Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising... and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you”

(Matthew 28:19,20), He was thinking about equipping to serve: to serve God and to serve our neighbour. Amen.