

A Final Word About Our Lenten Journey
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During this Lenten season, it has been our aim to explore the communities Paul first engaged, and the ones that have shaped our faith. And just like Paul, we've tried to be honest, maybe even cantankerous at times, as we've compared ancient voices with modern ones, and sought to reconcile their differences.

To be sure, there are a number of verses in Paul's authentic epistles and others bearing his name that give us pause – words that have been redacted, twisted, abused, used entirely out of context to help keep the powerful propped up, and to marginalize, villainize, or Samaritanize those who aren't in power. Of course, the same is true for our Gospels, and just about every other portion of our sacred scriptures.

But if we open ourselves, we can also hear beauty and authentic humanity in the words spoken to these ancient communities. Paul tells them, and us as well: Speak truthfully to one another, for we are members of one body. God has given us grace. Something transformative has happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and it has changed our very existence. Faith, hope, and love are good things, and the greatest is love. Rejoice in the Lord. Always. There's a table for you. Christ said, "This is my body for you. And this is my life-force for you. And each time you eat and you drink, I am with you, and you proclaim my transformative spirit. And guess what, Sardis Baptist Church, you're invited!"

In the past six weeks, we've heard five proclaimers, three women and two men, not to mention the additional fourteen proclaimers this morning who spoke in song. And there have been other voices too, they've used their hands, and their prayers, and their presence. And I don't think, in all the time that I've spent talking to and with Paul in those letters of his, there is anything, ANYTHING, NOT ONE THING, that Paul would disapprove of as we seek to be Sardis Baptist Church.

This morning, we stand high-atop Jerusalem's holy mountain, ready to follow Christ into a tumultuous week. When next we gather, it'll be at a table on Thursday evening. If we are smart, if we are thoughtful, if we are open, we will hear and receive Paul's words. Because Friday is hard. And to make it through Friday, we need the strength of a table. And we, like Paul, must recognize that our ability to follow the Christ and do the work that is required of us – that is to make this world God's world – that journey and that work can only be made manifest, if they are done in communities undergirded in the Christ.

And like Paul, we cannot be content to see Sunday as our only resurrection. When the lilies have lost their pedals, and all that's left of the Easter candy are your least favorite flavor of jelly beans, and the triumphant Hallelujah chorus is but a distant echo, Caesar's weightiness will return with all of its isms and issues. And we will have to decide, does a community bound together at a table, and transformed by the resurrected Christ – does such a community have the power to see winds and flames at Pentecost, and to feel the spirit fall fresh upon them? Does such a community have the power to believe that a stubborn legalist can be reclaimed and resurrected on a Damascus Road? Does such a community have the power to believe that God is doing new things, right now, with us, in Charlotte? And that those new things matter?

May I offer advice to us from Paul, with a slight redaction, but one I think he'd approve of. "May God strengthen you in HER glorious might, to meet whatever comes each day with patience, fortitude, and joy. May it be so. And may it be soon! Amen.