

"GRACE DISPENSERS"*{I Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-15}*

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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I read a story about two men from New York City who had never been out of the city. They decided they had enough of city life; therefore, they made up their minds that to go west and try to live off the land like their ancestors had done. As they arrived in the Midwest they determined they would need a mule to help them with the plowing; so, they found the local general store and asked the owner if he had any mules for sale.

The owner of the store told them, *"No, I'm afraid not, boys!"*

The two men noticed a stack of honeydew melons against the wall. They asked the storeowner, *"What are those things over there?"*

The store owner decided to have a little fun with these two city-slickers and told them they were mule eggs and said they were welcome to take a couple with them. He said, *"You just take those eggs home and wait for them to hatch, and you'll have yourself a couple of mules!"*

The two men from New York thanked the storeowner kindly and set two of the honeydew melons in the back of their pickup.

As the two men were driving down the road they hit a big bump, which caused one of the melons to bounce out and break open on the road.

Looking back they saw that they had lost one of their mule eggs and they immediately stopped the truck and got out to take a look and see what had become of it.

As they were getting out of the truck a long eared rabbit crossed the road, and seeing the melon busted on the ground hopped right in the middle of it and began eating the melon.

As the two men came around the truck, the one exclaimed, *"Hey, our mule egg has hatched! Let's get our mule!"*

The two men moved toward the rabbit, but it took off hopping. They chased it this way, then that way, then this way again, trying to corner it somehow. Finally, after what seemed like an hour of chasing that rabbit the two men gave up. They both collapsed on the ground.

One man said, *"Well, I guess we lost our mule!"*

The other replied grimly, *"Yes, but you know, I'm not sure I wanted to plow that fast anyway!"*

That kind of describes how the church goes about their business—uncertain what our real task is as dispensers of God's grace and how to go about it—so, in the meantime we get sidetracked—and satisfied with the mundane instead of the genuine article!

Many of us think that the controlling factor in what we learn is the knowledge and ability of the preacher and/or teacher; however, what Paul is suggesting in our text is that the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian Christians had limited what he was able to teach them. I once read that “*A great audience makes a great speaker!*” I have come to realize the truth in that statement—what is communicated is controlled by the interest, experience, understanding, and spiritual maturity of the listener.

I heard the other day of a minister who had pastored a church for quite some time who resigned to accept a call to a church in another town. Following a pastor’s resignation it is customary for a lay committee to conduct a mission review to determine the status of the church and type person they need to lead the congregation—matching skills, gifts, needs, etc.

This church hired a consultant who had conducted a nationwide survey and compiled all the qualities respondents expected from a “perfect pastor.” Results from the computerized survey indicated...

- ✚ The perfect pastor preaches exactly 12 minutes
- ✚ He/she frequently condemns sin but never upsets anyone
- ✚ He/she works from 8:00 A.M. until 12:00 midnight—and is also the church custodian
- ✚ He/she makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a good car, and gives about \$80 a week to the poor.
- ✚ He/she is 28 years of age and has been preaching for approximately 30 years.
- ✚ He/she is wonderfully gentle and good looking.
- ✚ They give themselves completely but never gets too close to anyone lest they be criticized
- ✚ They speak out boldly on social issues, but must never become politically involved.
- ✚ They have a burning desire to work with teenagers; and they spend all their time with senior citizens.
- ✚ They make 15 calls daily on parish families, visit the shut-ins, and those in hospitals, plus they spend all their time evangelizing the unchurched, and they’re always in their study when needed.

The consultant then added a footnote to the survey results: “*If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this survey to six other churches that are tired of their pastor too. Then, bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of this list. In one week you will receive 1,643 pastors; and...at least one of them should be perfect. And...have faith in this survey—one church broke the chain and got its old pastor back in less than 30 days!*”

In this entire section Paul is relating on how the church should view their leadership and their roles as grace dispensers.

In the first few verses he says in essence: *“Grow up! Stop acting like babies! You’ve been around long enough to begin to mature in your faith. You no longer should be nursed along—you’re ready for some solid food! No longer do you need to be hand fed—the time has come for you to feed yourselves!”*

Nothing is more discouraging to a pastor than those members who remain in infancy and never grow up spiritually. I know some young people who have become spiritual giants; and, at the same time, I know of others who’ve been “in the kingdom” for years and they’re still at the place of their entry!

THE CHURCH IS GOD’S FIELD

Paul uses agricultural analogy in which he likened the role he played in dispensing God’s grace as that of a seed planter...Apollos was the one responsible for watering the seeds that had been planted. They both knew their roles—as all of us should—neither was more important than the other. He very quickly makes it clear that each of us has specific tasks in our dispensing of God’s grace...but, in the end, **it is God who makes it grow.**

Every so often Irma comes home with some potted plants needing to be placed in the ground. Whenever possible we ask our gardener, Jesus’ Ruiz to plant them for us—if he’s not available—I plant them. It is then my task to fertilize them, water them...but, neither Irma, Jesus’, nor I have the ability to make that plant bloom—that’s God’s task! It’s God’s field!

That’s our role as believers—**to plant seeds** by our lives to others—**that’s a grace dispenser! Someone else comes along and waters that seed by their life...**but, in the end—**it’s God that brings it all into fruition** with one who blooms forth with new life that He gives!

Who was more important? Irma? Jesus’? Me? Nope—none of us—we just had our specific tasks—it is God who blesses what we do!

PERSONALITY CULTS

The Corinthians were divided because of loyalties to personalities rather than to God. Some were calling themselves disciples of Paul, others to Apollos, yet others to Cephas {Peter}. There were also those who added they were disciples of Christ—while all of these were servants.

Personality cults have been part of the church just as they have been in our secular life of politics, business, education. There are those who are divided in their loyalties and lift up personalities as if they were God, rather than God’s servants—

Billy Graham
Joel Osteen
Robert Schuller

Charles Stanley
Bill Hybels
Rick Warren
Chuck Swindoll

These are all God's servants whom God has blessed enormously—and I thank God for each of them—I greatly admire some of them—but, their roles do not minimize mine...nor yours!

We are all servants of God...ministers...seed planters...waterers...the field and the harvest is God's!

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked!” {Luke 12:48, NIV}

We are ALL partners together!

Billy Graham told Baptist minister, Kenneth Chafin: *“I envy the work of the pastor. I'm called to preach the gospel and to ask for that first decision for Christ. But the pastor has the privilege of relating all the teachings of the Scripture to that convert as they grow.”*

I recall the fall of 1969 when I went to Arcadia, California, as youth pastor in a large Presbyterian Church. I was handed a shoebox with names of several hundred junior high, high school, and college youth on 3 x 5 index cards who were potential members of the group. At the time, however, there were about 20 in the high school Westminster Fellowship, a good more in the junior high confirmation class *{many because their parents wanted them to join the church for that was the thing to do}*, and about 10-12 in the college group.

Shortly after I arrived, we went to Pacific Palisades for a retreat with the leaders of the high school group—comprised of nearly everyone who had attended once the year before *{some were officers who had only attended one or two meetings}*. I soon discovered that only a handful of these kids had a clue what it meant to have Christ in their life. At the end of the retreat I gave an invitation to receive Christ as Savior and nearly all of them responded. I was overwhelmed!

The following week Billy Graham began his crusade in Anaheim. These kids were now revved up and we decided to take several car loads to the crusade. Each night more attended...each night we waited in the parking lot of Angel Stadium for kids who had gone forward to invite Christ into their lives. By the end of the week we were taking two bus loads and we told the kids we would wait for them if they chose to respond to Dr. Graham's invitation.

At the conclusion of the crusade nearly 50 youth responded to the invitation, and Irma will tell you that I spent nearly every evening, all day Saturday, Sunday afternoons following up on each of these kids. Soon we had several hundred kids involved in the program.

Seeds were planted by kids who invited other kids...Billy Graham was faithful in giving the message...God gave the increase...and my responsibility was to give them milk and move them along into spiritual maturity as quickly as possible. *{I am still in contact with a number of these people!}*

TRINITY

God called me nearly 30 years ago to follow the steps of those whom God used as pastors at Trinity—John Chandler, Frank Havens, and Aahmes Overton—all choice servants of God. I built on the foundations they laid down...and, before too long another will follow in my footsteps.

Different servants at different times do their particular task, but God is the One who gives any increase!

In our youth ministry...

...Vincent plants *{and builds on foundation laid by Danny Franklin}*

...Ryan waters

...Chelsea, Jake, and Richie fertilize

...each one is a grace dispenser

...and God blesses!

CONCLUSION

Finally, Paul moves from the agriculture to a building. Some lay foundations...others build upon it...but **the primary foundation is Jesus Christ—our solid rock!**

Go from here this morning realizing anew that you are a dispenser of God's grace! Plant those seeds...and watch them as they're nurtured and come into fruition.