Advent Midweek 3 – December 18, 2024
Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Theme: Judgement!

Paul uses the word "judge" several times in this section of his letter to the people of Corinth. "Judge" is an English word that is used to translate several different Greek words that, while related, have different nuances of meaning. For us, we can only depend on the context to understand what someone means by the word "judge." It might be a statement of guilt or innocence. "You are judged innocent." It might be an official who determines guilt or innocence. "The judge acquitted you." It might be a statement of preference or worth. "You were judged first place." It might be a line of thought. "I judge that you will regret that." But Greek is more specific.

When Paul says,

"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court." He is talking about the work put in by someone who is called to judge a case. A judge usually does a great deal of preliminary work before he is ready to render a judgement. Paul is saying that you can do all the study of his case that you wish, but it doesn't matter, because you are not going to be the one to render a verdict. This reminds me of the frequent case of "trial by public opinion" that we see on TV and in the newspapers. I don't

know about you, but I really could care less about what celebrities think about anything that is outside of their expertise. If Oprah wants to talk about hosting a talk show, she might have something valuable to say, but I personally am not looking to Oprah to help me understand an elected official's platform or the guilt or innocence of someone charged with a crime. Paul is telling the Corinthians, who had been very negative about his ministry and message, that he honestly doesn't care about their opinions. Everybody has one and Paul has no obligation to listen to their opinions about him or his ministry. He goes on to say,

"In fact, I do not even judge myself." That is most interesting because he uses the same verb. He does not spend time analyzing his case and wondering whether he will be judged favorably. He is called to do a job and he is called by the Lord. Sometimes the audience will receive him well and sometimes they won't but his only concern is whether he is faithful to his calling and is proclaiming what his boss, the Lord Jesus Christ, tells him to proclaim. Pastors today often forget what Jesus said about serving two masters. It cannot be done. You can only serve one at a time. A pastor's only concern is to serve his one boss, Jesus. Sometimes the people to whom Jesus sends him are going to receive him well and sometimes he might have to shake the dust from his sandals and

move on. But sometimes pastors become frozen in fear trying to serve their Lord and a person or people in a congregation. As I have told several pastors in my career as a VP of the district, if they are not receiving you, you cannot ask the whole congregation to move. Jesus did not say tell everyone to whom I have called you to shake the dust from their sandals and send a new congregation. I have also reminded congregations that the Lord sent them this man as their pastor. Perhaps they should listen to what he has to say as long as what he is saying is Biblical because if it is Biblical, he is correctly serving his master. Paul goes on to say,

"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 his commendation from God."

Here Paul uses two verbs. "It is the Lord who judges me," uses the same verb as before. It is the Lord who prepares a case against me. He is watching and putting the evidence in order, no one else matters. Then he changes the verb. "Therefore do not pronounce judgement before the time." Here he uses the verb that refers here

and elsewhere to eternal punishment. The case has been decided and the sentence is delivered.

Only the Lord can pronounce judgement against us and he *already* *has*. He said from the cross, "It is finished." That was the final pronouncement of judgement against all human beings. So, we do not fear the final judgement because we know that our acquittal is not based on *our* actions but on the actions of the Lord. We have been acquitted and now we either live in the light of the Gospel or the darkness of despair in which dwell those who know the law, because it is written on every person's heart, but they do not know forgiveness.

So, what is our calling? It is the same as Paul's. We proclaim the forgiveness of the Lord. We strive to help people understand that their salvation is never dependent upon their actions but rather, it is dependent only on Jesus and He has declared us righteous. That is the good news we get to share with all who dwell in the darkness of despair. Sometimes they will thank us and praise us. Sometimes they will hate us and mock us. It matters not. We don't work for them. We serve Christ alone, and we follow only him.