

Epiphany is the season of revealing. It is the season when light shines, when what has been hidden becomes visible, when we discover—sometimes to our surprise—that God is already at work in places we did not expect. And today, Epiphany reveals something a little uncomfortable and a little hopeful at the same time: When we read someone else's mail, we begin to hear our own names.

Corinth was a loud, busy, wealthy, crowded, competitive city. In Paul's time—and even today—it sits near the isthmus connecting the Peloponnesian Peninsula to mainland Greece, strategically placed along major trade routes. It is defensible by land and sea, and ideas flow through it as freely as goods and money. At the time of Paul's letter, the city was buzzing with new philosophies, new religious practices, old gods and new gods. Success, influence, image, and status mattered deeply.

Corinth was a place where persuasion was prized, where public speech was a performance and where a confident manner often counted more than character. Even religion could become something you *displayed* rather than something that reshaped how you lived.

And into that city God planted a church. Not a polished institution. Not a spiritual showcase. But a small, vulnerable community meeting in homes, sharing meals, praying together, learning to follow Jesus in the middle of competing voices and constant pressure.

But then... you know how it goes.

If you want a modern comparison, imagine a church email thread that spirals out of control. Someone writes something offhand. Someone else misreads the tone. Someone assumes the worst. Someone forwards it to someone they probably shouldn't have. And suddenly people are reacting instead of listening.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians feels like that moment when someone finally steps in and says: "Whoa. Sisters and brothers. Slow down. Let's sit together and remember who we are."

Paul doesn't write the letter to the Corinthian Church to shame them. He writes because he loves them and because he believes God is not finished with them.

Paul begins the letter this way:

"From Paul, called by God's will to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, and from Sosthenes our brother." That detail matters. Paul doesn't introduce himself as: "Paul, spiritual expert" or "Paul, eloquent speaker" or "Paul, founder of successful churches." He says, simply, "*Paul, called.*" Called by God's will—not self-appointed and sent, not self-promoted.

Paul's authority does not come from impressiveness.
It comes from calling.

For us here at Menno – for many Anabaptist Mennonites, this language should feel deeply familiar. We are, after all, a people shaped by communal discernment. We listen together for God's call. We call pastors and preachers, teachers and worship leaders, accompanists and planners, accountants and

administrators, cooks, quilters, farmers, builders, caregivers, writers, and pray-ers. We believe the Spirit speaks through the whole body and calls from within. Therefore, when we respond to God's call, it isn't because we want to be popular or visible (at least it shouldn't be because of this) but because we are faithful.

Paul continues:

"To God's church that is in Corinth..." Not the church shaped by Corinth's values. Not the church owned by its strongest personalities. But *the church of God*—located in Corinth.

Paul then describes the community in two ways that must be held together: They have been made holy in Christ Jesus and they are called to be holy. They are already claimed by grace and they are still learning how to live that grace out.

Holiness here does not mean moral perfection, it means being set apart for God's purposes. Paul reminds the Corinthian Church that they are part of something larger—*"together with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place."* They belong. The church – not just the individuals within it – but the church as the body has been and is called to holiness. The church is not a collection of spiritual consumers. It is a people called into shared obedience.

Before Paul names a single problem, he speaks blessing:

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul gives thanks—not for Corinth's success—but for God's grace at work among them. He names their gifts: speech, knowledge, spiritual vitality as well as traits that lead to deeper relationships with God. The Corinthian Church prayed passionately, spoke boldly, and they thought deeply about faith.

However, Paul also knows that spiritual gifts while evidence of grace—are not proof of a mature faith. Similarly, a church can be spiritually alive and still hurt the members within the body.

Paul thanks *God* for the Spiritual gifts manifested by the Corinthian Church. He doesn't thank the Corinthian church. His gratitude redirects their thoughts from pride of their accomplishments to pride to what God is accomplishing through them.

Paul continues by addressing their task of waiting. "As you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." This reminds the church that their waiting is not passive; it demands the church's faithful attention. The Corinthians were tempted to act as though they had already arrived; that their spiritual journey had already been fulfilled. But the Christian life is a waiting life. We live between what God has already done and what God has not yet finished.

Waiting is like tending a garden; You prepare the soil, you plant the seeds, water faithfully but you cannot rush the growth. Churches that try to force maturity often damage what they are trying to grow. Instead, Paul encourages the church – and us – to wait. Waiting teaches humility and trust and reminds us that God is still at work—even when we are not in control.

Paul assures the church in Corinth that God will strengthen them to the end, not because they are impressive but because God is faithful.

Then Paul gathers everything into one sentence: “God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship—*koinōnia*—of his Son.”

Koinōnia.

Koinonia means: Participation, partnership, communion, shared life. Koinonia is the name for holy community – blessed community. To be called into Christ is to be called into one another.

Like the Early church, this too is the heart of our Anabaptist expression of faith. In a perfect world, our churches discern the will of God together. We confess together. We forgive together and we bear one another's burdens. Spiritual gifts only make sense inside that shared life.

Therefore, a spiritual gift that fractures community has lost its purpose. A gift that silences others no longer serves Christ. Because true authority flows from obedience to God's call—not charisma, tradition, family name, money or status.

Corinth was gifted—and divided. They were rich in speech and knowledge, yet prone to competition and elitism.

Today, the church in the United States is rich in resources, technology, programs, and theological access. And we, too, are often divided by personality by ideology by worship style by power. And the shared risk is the same: We still mistake spiritual giftedness for faithfulness.

Then and now, quiet, love-centered Christ-like leadership is often overlooked for flashy “get them into the pews kind of leadership.

Then and now, holiness is misunderstood.

Then and now, waiting feels uncomfortable.

Paul's balance remains: We wait—actively, humbly, faithfully—trusting God to finish what God has begun.

This week, Epiphany reveals not only Christ—but the church.

It reveals that we are: Called, not self-made. We are gifted, but not complete. We are waiting, not lording our success. We are together, whether we like it or not and above all, **God is faithful.**

This faithfulness—not our unity, not our gifts, not our success—is the light revealed to us in Christ.

God is still stitching.

Still shaping.

Still holding us together.

And that is good news For Corinth and for us.