

1 Corinthians 3:4-11
“A Non-Compete Agreement Worth Making”
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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Communion Sunday, June 26, 2022

The Reading – Contemporary English Version:

1 Corinthians 3:4-11

⁴ *Some of you say you follow me, and others claim to follow Apollos. Isn't this how ordinary people behave?*

⁵ *Apollos and I are merely servants who helped you to have faith. It was the Lord who made it all happen. ⁶ I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, but God made them sprout and grow. ⁷ What matters isn't those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow. ⁸ The one who plants is just as important as the one who waters. And each one will be paid for what they do. ⁹ Apollos and I work together for God, and you are God's garden and God's building.*

¹⁰ *God treated me with undeserved grace and let me become an expert builder. I laid a foundation on which others have built. But we must each be careful how we build, ¹¹ because Christ is the only foundation.*

Roslindale Congregational Church has worked with fifteen settled pastors over its 128-year history! I still come across people who remember as far back as Rev. Worthley, and more recently, who Branwen Cook, and of course, Pastor Jason Donnelly.

Did you know that pictures of all the former settled pastors hang on the wall in the church office? It's a nice reminder that you have successfully navigated multiple pastoral transitions, and you will again this time by God working through you!

The Corinthian Christians didn't have as much experience with pastoral transitions under their belt as you do. The apostle Paul founded this congregation during his mission work. When he left them, multiple lay leaders there carried on the mission, most notably a couple named Priscilla and Aquila who had come to know Paul as they worked together manufacturing tents. Another minister named Chloe is also mentioned in this letter with some kind of important pastoral role in the Corinthian congregation.

Into this legacy comes Apollos. He may have been the new settled pastor after this 'interim period.' Apollos was a Jewish Christian who hailed from Alexandria, Greece. We know from his story in Acts 18 that he was well-versed in the scriptures, spoke accurately of Jesus, and had been baptized by John. Another of his gifts was eloquence in preaching. Priscilla and Aquila mentored this young minister, and eventually he came to Corinth to be a part of the team. The church folks started comparing him to Paul and vice versa.

Now, I think comparing ministers is natural and inevitable during transitions. Human beings can't help but notice the differences between pastors – their

background, their styles of leading, their weaknesses, and their priorities. They have different gifts. Plus, persons develop affinities and loyalties with some leaders and not others, what they like and don't like, whether they connect personally or not. Have you noticed this during your time at RCC?

My husband and I have started watching the British drama, *Grantchester*. It's about a vicar who helps the local authorities solve murders (as if this is realistic!). Nevertheless, the series draws you in to the characters and to parish life, so much so, that when vicar Sidney left the show, and his assistant, Leonard, held down the fort, and then Will, a new vicar, arrived, the parish folk made comparisons between them. Not only did they! As viewers, Steve and I had grown attached to Sydney and couldn't quite give him up, unsure we even wanted to keep watching!

Well, the Corinthians let these kinds of comparisons and their loyalty to Paul or Apollos get out of hand. It turned into a competition. Some members said, "I belong to Paul," and others said, "I belong to Apollos." Chloe reported this, and Paul wrote them this letter to nip this behavior in the bud. As ego-centric as Paul could be, to his credit, he rightly pointed out that in the grand scheme of things, he didn't count. Apollos didn't count. **What counts in the Christian community is God in Christ, working through all of us together to accomplish God's mission.**

Paul calls the laity *and* the clergy "diakonia," a Greek word that can be translated "servants" "ministers," and "deacons." So *all* in the church, including Chloe, Priscilla, and Aquila, were pastoral leaders doing the work of ministry. He also uses the word "synergos" for the manner of working together in the church. Yes, you hear our English word "synergy" in it, and this has been translated in verse 9 as "co-workers" and "fellow laborers." There is no room for division over pastoral leaders.

Paul also puts the situation into perspective by saying: "You are God's field; one plants and another waters, but it is God who gives the growth." "You are God's building; take care how you build on the foundation, and remember that the only foundation of the church is Jesus Christ." **In other words, the only way that the church should handle pastoral transitions is through *cooperating* with each other and God.**

Paul's guidance reminds me of how builders of Cathedrals had to work. They had to be excellent craftspeople and do quality work, on the existing foundation. They also had to cooperate with each other and with those that would come after, because they would not see the completion of the cathedral in their lifetime!

Cooperation should be a mantra during transitions of other kinds too, especially in our world: cooperation between educators, CEOs, leaders of nonprofits, and cooperation between elected officials! God's Greater Good is at stake.

I recall in my own growing up, how the minister in my home church at the time married a minister, and she came to serve our congregation *with* him. I was in college during this transition, but I heard how some congregants whispered and resisted. However, she brought new, additional gifts in synergy with his. Plus, personally, I so appreciated that my younger brother related well with her during a time when our father was AWOL. It became clear that God was working through the two of them and all of us.

You may have heard that in the corporate and high tech world some employees have to sign a non-compete clause in their contracts? I am way over-simplifying it, but this agreement means that if they leave the company, they will not make use of any of its

proprietary materials in their new job, or start a business in direct competition with their former employer.

Well, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians and us today to agree to a *different kind of non-compete* – one that *you* can make during your current transition to cooperate with the new minister, so that as I move on, God can optimally work God’s mission through you. This would be a great joy to me, and add to your number of positive transitions.