**Sermon 5/26/19**

**2nd Corinthians 10:7-18 & 11:23-29**

The recruit remembered well August of 1974 in Fort Dix, New Jersey,

          where he did his basic training for the U.S. Army.

The Vietnam War was almost over . . . . but not quite.

It would end six months after he joined.

The Army was still training them as if they were going to the jungles of 'Nam.

All of his drill sergeants were tough combat veterans.

So was their company commander.

About 5 feet, 6 inches tall … all muscle … not an ounce of fat on him;

           never smiled … always tense … never relaxed … jaws always clenched.

He was one hard-core dude. The man made such an impression on the recruit he still

          remembers his name – his full name: Captain Larry F. Decker.

Twice a week, usually before some grueling physical training exercise, he would

climb up on the reviewing stand and give the same basic speech over and over again.

His topic was always about Endurance: Keep going when you feel like giving up.

Dig deep into your guts, your heart, your soul, to find that deep reservoir

            of hidden strength which you never knew you had.

It is endurance which keeps us going when we want to lay down and quit.

He would pepper his speech with gruesome, detailed examples from his combat

          experiences: of men who had been shot, or blown up, but still kept fighting.

Endurance, our inner-strength, was what Captain Larry F. Decker was talking about:

          that deep down inner-strength which we don't know we have until

          circumstances force us to reach deep, deep down into our guts, our hearts, our

          souls, to that hidden reservoir of strength which keeps us going, even when

          every cell in our body seems to be screaming at us to just lie down and quit.

Captain Larry F. Decker would have loved the Apostle Paul.

Paul was very familiar with endurance and inner strength.

Five separate times he received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

            But he didn't quit.

He went on to the next town and started preaching in the synagogue there.

Three times he was beaten with rods, but he continued on his journeys.

When he was imprisoned, he preached the Gospel within the prison walls.

Stonings couldn't stop him. Shipwrecks couldn't stop him.

Hunger, and thirst, and lack of sleep, couldn't stop him.

The Gentiles couldn't stop him. The Jews couldn't stop him.

           The Romans couldn't stop him.

Through his faith he discovered he had a never ending source of endurance in Jesus.

His personal encounter with the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus,

            was so totally life-changing, that nothing, and no person,

             could stop him from preaching the Good News everywhere he went.

Besides everything else, he daily faced the pressure of his concern

           for all the churches he had started.

He visited the cities of Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Galatia, Colossae, Cyprus,

          Crete, Malta, Athens, Syracuse, Iconium Antioch, and Rome,

          establishing about 20 churches.

Paul was concerned for the individuals in each of the churches he started.

He had great compassion for every church, and every person in them.

He identified himself with them, and worried, and prayed, and cared for them.

Though a powerful, direct, and engaging speaker, Paul was being spurned by those

          who preferred a more golden–tongued style, with lots of rhetorical flourish.

Such orators may have attracted applause and money, but Paul was looking

          for results in the form of changed lives, and growing faith, not profit or fame.

These false teachers were into showmanship, they were dynamic preachers,

For them performance mattered more than substance.

And the Church of Corinth had been won over by them.

The first nine chapters mainly show Paul's relief at seeing

         encouraging signs of faith in Corinth.

But these last chapters make clear that hostility was still raging.

Here at the end of 2nd Corinthians, Paul boldly confronts his critics.

A Native American Indian in Arizona listened to a politician give a speech.

After the politician was finished, another Indian asked the first what he thought of it.

He replied, "Big wind! Loud thunder! No rain!"

Translation: Lots of noise but no content, no results.

Paul could have used this description when he warned the Corinthians

            about the false preachers who were turning them away from the true faith.

Lots of talk, great performance, good entertainment, but false teaching.

Paul insisted that the future of the Corinthian church,

            not just his own reputation, was at stake.

Judge for yourself, Paul said, to the Corinthians and to all of us:

          Who really cares about you? Who watches over you?

          Who saved you?

The Corinthians had received false teachers and followed false leadership.

They paid more attention to the messenger than the message.

Paul had preached the true gospel for free,

         while the false preachers peddled a false gospel for profit.

They preached a different Jesus, a different Spirit, and a different Gospel.

Paul's message focused solely on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A preacher was on an airplane, traveling from Chicago to California.

Halfway through the flight they ran into some very severe turbulence.

The plane began to shake terribly and the passengers were getting alarmed.

Even the flight attendants were looking concerned.

Finally, one of the passengers, who sat behind the preacher,

              leaned over the seat, tapped him on the shoulder, and begged:

            "This is really frightening. Do you suppose you could

             … I don't know ... do something religious?"

The preacher paused for a few minutes.

He smiled at the other passengers, and promptly took up a collection.

Well, it is kind of a religious thing. In fact, it is a Biblical thing.

But it wasn't a very helpful, or caring, or truthful, thing.

Paul cared. He cared about Jesus, he cared about the Gospel message,

         he cared about the Corinthians,

         and all the members of the churches he had started.

Paul was honest. He told the truth about Jesus, and forgiveness.

To be concerned about just one church would be stressful enough,

          but Paul was concerned about all the churches

          where he had preached or served.

And he had the scars to prove it.

Paul never gave up on those he loved.

Nothing could stop him from sharing the Good News, everywhere he went,

          with everyone he encountered, in any way he could, all the time.

A doctor, an engineer, and a politician were arguing as to which profession was older.

The doctor spoke first:

             "Without a physician mankind could not have survived,

             So I am sure that mine is the oldest profession."

The engineer disagreed and said:

              "Before life began there was complete chaos,

             And it took an engineer to create some appearance of order from this chaos.

             So engineering is older."

"You are both wrong," said a confident politician,

“Who do you think created the chaos?”

We humans are very good at creating chaos, regardless of our profession.

God is the only one who could create this world in all the chaos.

God is the one who loves us, forgives us, and guides us.

As we read Paul's letters, we remember who God is:

He is the one who is with us in the confusing, frightening, difficult times of life.

And he is the one who gives us the strength and endurance

          to get through the tough times.

AMEN