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This Sermon Was Given Using a Powerpoint Presentation

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Sermon Theme: Questions Only God Answers

1. Who Am I? 2. Why Am I Here? 3. Where Am I Going?

1 Corinthians 1: 1-9

*Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup> To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup> For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— <sup>6</sup> God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. <sup>8</sup> He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Dear brothers and sisters in the family of God,

Ask good questions and you'll learn a lot about life. For example, four year olds ask great questions: why is the sky blue? Why is grass green? Why did God create mosquitoes? To be honest, my 4 year old friends, I'm still trying to find a good answer to that last one. Kids in school ask questions to learn about God's world. Grown-up still ask questions about their taxes or their smartphones. It's usually at a major milestone that we ask the greatest questions of all: at graduation: what do I want to do when I grow up? When a young lady receives a marriage proposal, what will she say? It's usually when death coldly stares us in the face, we come to most important question of all: "what happens next?" The answers we give will determine how we live and how we will die. Now you can search google for answers. You can ask mom or dad, or even grandma or grandpa. You can try to go it alone with your own experience and knowledge. Just make sure your info is correct. Maybe that's why we need the apostle Paul to give inside information that's absolutely accurate and relevant. His source is God Himself. And today, we're going to consider **Questions that Only God Answers**. Sooner or later, every one of us will have to personally answer the following questions that are simple, but as deep as the ocean: questions like: who am I (am I here by accident or by design?). Why am I here? (just to make a lot of money, just to have fun – or for a higher purpose). And where am I going? (heaven, hell?). In our sermon reading, the inspired writer Paul definitively answers these questions for Christian believers to give us our identity, purpose, and eternity.

There's something special about the way Paul opens his letter to his fellow believers in the big city of Corinth. Paul tells them up front who he is and why he's able to explain to the Corinthians who they are. Like a FBI agent flashing his credentials, Paul reveals his identity this way: **Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God**. So why did Paul begin this formal way? Besides simply introducing himself, he was making a point. Remember Paul helped to start this particular church – it was near and dear to his heart. But, there were also church members who had past run-ins with Paul and they didn't appreciate what he had to say. Bottom line: they didn't respect Paul or his office. They had the attitude: "Well, Paul if you don't tell me what I want to hear, I'll find another pastor who will." Now you understand why Paul said these words. He explained to them his apostolic authority. Paul was no spiritual



suck-up, preaching political poppycock or syrupy feel-good religion. Jesus Christ Himself had called him to his position to tell them God's message of Law and Gospel. So who was Paul? He was God's apostle, sent out and qualified to explain to the Corinthians who they were.

Immediately, he explains their identity. He wrote: **to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people.** Paul isn't buttering these people up. He's boldly reminding them who they are. They are God's sanctified people. If there was anyone in that congregation going through an identity crisis, then what Paul explains here is of great assurance. From before the creation of the world, God has known all about us. More than that, we matter to Him. He has called lost sinners like us by His Gospel message to be saved eternally by Jesus Christ. He has justified us, that is, He has declared us "not-guilty" of our damning sins by reason of Jesus Christ and His holy blood shed on the cross in our place. Through baptism, He has sanctified us. The technical word for "sanctified" is to make us holy. He has sanctified us through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit for a life of grateful service. So God's given us our Christian identity. That's who the Corinthians were and that's who we are: we God's saved and sanctified people. But, there is something more to our identity. **2To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** These words tell us we are not alone. God has joined us together with other believers, with Christians around the world. The bottom line is this: who we are is not determined by our job title, likes on Facebook, or our performance on the basketball court or musical stage. Who we are is defined by God and He has done for us. He has sanctified us and brought us together into the church with other believers. We can so easily forget that.

Have you ever seen the Disney classic: "The Lion King"? Remember when the lion cub Simba ran away from home. He was carrying some pretty heavy baggage because of past mistakes. Really, he was questioning his identity. At a key point in the story, the wise baboon Rafiki raps him on the head by telling him the truth: "You don't even know who you are." His main point was this: you will never find the right answers in life without first coming to grips who you are. It's important that we understand the answer to life's first important question: "Who are you?". If we don't, we will never understand the answers to the second two questions. Who we are determines what we do, how we act, and where we are going. We are not here by accident, by Evolutionary chance. We are here by God's design. **Only God Can Answer This Question: who are we?** We are God's saved and sanctified people. Now, you know. So remember who you are.

That leads us to the next question: **Why are we here?** Now that's a **Question Only God can Answer.** The Corinthians were asking that question. It was really a question of purpose. If you read the rest of 1 Corinthians, you'll learn these early Christians struggled with selfishness, bitterness, and division. So Paul answers them: **5For in him (God) you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.** In a very kind way, Paul points to the reason why they were in Corinth. God had put them there and blessed them with spiritual gifts to use in His kingdom. They were enriched in every way. This was a capable congregation with a ton of God-given ability. But, somewhere along the way, they lost their Christian purpose. Here Paul encourages them and us to put our Christian gifts to good use. In the short time I've been here in New Ulm, it's obvious how this congregation has a ton of God-given gifts, every single one of you. Now, it's time for each of us, to use our God-given gifts to love and serve each other each



week. But, it's easy to forget our purpose. Think of it this way: A mother camel is talking with her child and he asks: "Mom why do I have these huge three toed feet?" The mother replies, "Well son, when we trek across the desert your toes will help you to stay on top of the soft sand". A few minutes later the son asks, "Mom, why do I have these long eyelashes?" "They are there to keep the sand out of your eyes on our trips through the desert". A short while later, the son asks, "Mom, why have I got these great big humps on my back?" The mother is growing impatient, and replies "They are there to help us store water so we can go distances without drinking." "Oh, so let me get this straight. We have huge feet to stop us sinking, long eyelashes to keep the sand from our eyes, and these humps to store water, but... Mom?" "Yes son?" "Why then are we in the San Diego zoo?" We need to not only know our purpose, but we need do something about it. And we are not trapped in the San Diego Zoo. We're free to serve God and other people today. We are free to go to Bible study. We're free to look through the bulletin announcements and become more involved in a St. Paul's ministry. And we are free to invite someone we know who doesn't go to church to join us to hear more about God's Word next week. Remember: our Christian mission is not to make ourselves more comfortable. We are not here to massage the saints. We are here because God has given us a mission. It is the high calling of proclaiming Jesus as the Savior of the world. So why are we here? That's a **question only God can answer**. We're here to put into practice the spiritual gifts we've been given to proclaim Christ.

Do you believe in destiny? Do you believe that the events of eternity are pre-determined to work out only one way? In one sense, every Christian should believe in this kind of destiny because every soul is destined to meet Jesus at the end of time. Our world is hurtling toward Judgement Day. But, that's not a threat – it's a promise. And, for the Christian, that's not scary, it's awesome. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers what will happen at the end of time **7Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** As people who are rock solid about our identity – we're God's justified and sanctified people; and we're very clear on why God has put us here – we're here to serve God and each other with His spiritual gifts, we are able to wait for Jesus to be revealed. Our time is shorter than we think. We're not going to stay in New Ulm forever. For the Christian believer, when we close our eyes in death, we'll open them immediately in heaven. That's our destiny. We're going to heaven, not because of who we are or what we have done for God, we're going to heaven by God's grace alone. That means our problems are temporary – our heartaches will one day be over. Yes, heaven is our final home. And God will keep us strong in that faith as we stay close to Him in Word and Sacrament.

Nine times in our nine verse sermon reading, St. Paul proclaims the name of Jesus. Do you realize this is the only place in the whole Bible this happens? When life gets tough (and it will), when we have doubts is this Christianity stuff is worth it, remember the name Jesus. Only Jesus gives us our identity, our purpose, and heaven. And there's no question about that. Amen.