

SLIDE 1

Plans Do Change!
2 Corinthians 1:12-2:5
July 14, 2024 West Valley Presbyterian Church

Last week we looked at what Paul had to say about comfort, since that is how he begins his letter. Comfort sets something of a context for everything else that he says in his letter. Today we're going to look at what was apparently a really touchy issue between Paul and the congregation: changed plans for a visit. We will be reading through 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4. Paul writes:

SLIDES 2-17

"Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity^[a] and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. ¹³For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, ¹⁴as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. ¹⁶I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

¹⁸But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas^[b] and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." ²⁰For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²²set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

²³I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. ²⁴Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. ²¹So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. ²For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? ³I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. ⁴For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you."

Here ends the reading of God's holy word. Join me in saying, Thanks be to God.

Have you ever felt disappointed, or gotten mad, because someone said they were going to come and visit you, and then they didn't? I guess the closest I've come to that would be when I went to a National Gathering before I came here. I'd contacted my successor at the Columbia church where I'd served for ten years, and made some tentative plans to connect at the National Gathering.

Somehow it didn't work out; and all I wound up doing was waving at him and shouting "Hi," as we were each moving through the crowds. That was hardly a major blow; but I did feel a little disappointed. A social connection that I'd hoped for, didn't happen. Oh well.

How about you? Has a relative or a close friend ever promised to visit you, and then they made other plans and didn't come after all? How did you feel about that?

Well, those feelings are something like what Paul was addressing in this second part of Chapter 1 and first few verses of Chapter 2. He was in Macedonia when he wrote this letter. Initially he'd planned to stop by Corinth on his way to Macedonia, pick up the financial gifts that the Macedonians had collected for the Christians in Judea who were in great need, stop by Corinth again on his way back to Judea (and pick up their financial gifts as well), and then bring both collections to Judea. That way, as he says, he could visit the Corinthians twice. He could bless them, and they could bless him as well.

SLIDE 18-19

However, his plans changed. He doesn't go into a lot of detail about why he changed his plans. But in Chapter 2, verse 1, he says, "So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you." Something really unpleasant must have happened in the Corinthian church in between the first letter he sent them (1st Corinthians) and this letter (2nd Corinthians)! We don't know what the issue was; it might have been related to the man sleeping with his stepmother that Paul mentioned in 1st Corinthians, but we don't know for sure. Dealing with the problem involved sending another letter, which we don't have. Paul refers to this intermediate letter in Verse 4 – "For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears". That does not describe 1st Corinthians, so, it refers to a letter we don't have. And dealing with the problem involved not only an anguished letter but also the painful visit that he refers to in Chapter 2 verse 1.

SLIDE 20-21

Whatever the problem was, dealing with it caused Paul a lot of pain as well as causing the Corinthian church a lot of pain. That's why he says, "So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice." Paul decided that since he was still upset over whatever it was that the Corinthians did, and since they also were still upset, it would be better to wait awhile before he came to visit in person. He says that he changed his plans – why? Because he loved them dearly. It wasn't that he wanted to inconvenience them or disappoint them. Further on in Chapter 2 he explains that he wanted them to have some time so they could all calm down, forgive the offender, comfort him (there's that theme of comfort again!), and reconcile. When he changed his travel plans, he wasn't trying to jerk them around. He was trying to give them some time to heal and be comforted.

However, the Corinthians clearly didn't like Paul's change of plan. Apparently they got really angry that he didn't visit them on his way to Macedonia, and didn't visit them on his way back either. We don't have their letter to Paul; but we can get a good sense of their feelings, based on what

Paul said back to them. They must have accused him of being fickle and not trustworthy, because Paul writes, “Was I fickle when I intended to do this [making the original plan of two visits, to and from Macedonia]? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both “Yes, yes” and “No, no”?” And they probably also accused him of not caring about them, because Paul writes, “I call God as my witness – and I stake my life on it – that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.” Wow. That’s strong language. Paul must have been really hurt by the Corinthians’ letter, to have responded so vehemently. He has feelings too.

I guess I’m not too surprised that the Corinthians were so angry. I’ve served six very different churches during my decades as a pastor. None of the churches EVER said, “Oh! Did our plans change? Why, that’s just splendid! We love change! It keeps things lively around here!” Small rural Southern churches, large Bay Area megachurches – one thing they all have in common: THEY DON’T LIKE CHANGE. We don’t either.

But the problem is, we can’t see all of time, as God can. We can see the present time, in the South Bay, at least in part. We can remember some of the past – though not always very accurately. But no matter how hard we try, we can’t usually predict what the future will bring; there are just too many variables. Weather predictions for tomorrow are usually accurate; there aren’t too many variables. But weather predictions for 6 months from now? Who knows? There are just too many variables; not even AI can accurately predict the weather six months from now. Unexpected things happen all the time.

Remember five years ago, back in the summer of 2019? Was anyone then predicting the Covid pandemic in 2020? No; no one was expecting that. Did the pandemic cause change in our church? It most certainly did; and not just our church, but the majority of churches across the country are struggling to recover. And what do you think this church is going to be like, five years from now? I don’t know; but it will probably be different from how it is now. We may not like change; but- it happens anyway. Our best bet is to trust God, who does see all of time – past, present and future. Only God knows what this church is going to be like five years from now. We can come up with plans; but chances are, things are going to be different from what we planned. The one thing we can be sure of is that God loves us and we are in his hands. We can trust him. In Jesus he has shown himself to be trustworthy, over and over again, for two thousand years. So I think we can trust him with our future as individuals, and as a church! Right?

All right. How do we do that? How do we trust God in the midst of change that we can’t predict? Well, I think we should do the best we can to figure out what God is doing right now, and then join in with whatever he is doing. For example: God blessed us with three new members last month: Bill and Becky Donnelly, and Karuna Velusamy. People in our area are visiting us; maybe we should be developing a little booklet with information about our church that the ushers could hand out. Or as another example: God is blessing the West Valley Neighborhood Church by bringing people to an Alpha group that they have just started. Alpha groups have proved to be one of the best ways of reaching out to people with no religious background. Maybe we should help by washing the dinner dishes. There’s a signup sheet on the refreshment table if you’re willing to help. Or as yet

another example: we will shortly be ordaining Bob Kuechler as a deacon. Maybe we should also be praying that God would raise up leaders as they are needed.

Plans do change. We may not like that; the Corinthians certainly didn't. But changes in plans are inevitable, since we don't know the future. Fortunately for us, God does know the future; he is completely trustworthy; and he can and he will lead us to our next step. So the next time plans change, let's try something different. Let's try praising God and trusting that he knows what is best. Amen.

And now I would like to invite Bob Kuechler to come forward, whom God has raised up for us in our need for more deacons.