



When Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth it was to a church that descended into factionalism. And so he wrote words that have been quoted to or at churches that find themselves in similar circumstances ever since (1 Cor 3: 3b-9)

*“For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, ‘I belong to Paul’, and another, ‘I belong to Apollos’, are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.”*

The meaning of these words should be clear. What we read in our passage from Acts is the background to all this.

The first part of the passage gives us an appreciation of the frenetic pace of Paul’s church planting. As soon as a church showed any signs of independent life, Paul would leave it in God’s care and move onto the next city where a new church had to be planted or an established church had to be nurtured. So he rushed from Corinth to Ephesus to Jerusalem to Antioch and then back to Galatia and Phrygia. The objective was always to plant churches that could survive and grow without having need of Paul’s constant attention. The church in Ephesus tried to persuade Paul to stay with them, but he refused, saying he would only return ‘if God wills.’ No wonder these churches would sometimes lose their way. Paul demanded a lot of them.

And then we are introduced to Apollos the waterer. He arrived in Ephesus speaking with great enthusiasm, learning and boldness. And yet also inaccurately because we are told that Priscilla and Aquila had to take him to one side and set him straight on a few things. He appears to have taken their teaching on board, because having cut his teeth in Ephesus, he went off to play a crucial role in the growth of the fledgling church in Corinth.



When people are called to ministry in the church, they are never the finished article when they are called. In fact, none of us are the finished article whatever our ministry in the church may be. And yet, we are still called. And once called we start our ministry, learning as we go, accepting learning from others who may not necessarily have the same gifts as us, but have been sent to us, nevertheless, to guide us in our ministry.

Churches that grow are churches where people who know themselves that they are not yet fully ready to carry out particular ministries, nevertheless feel able to be called, trusting that God will send the right people to continue their formation as they carry out the first stumbling steps of their ministry.

So churches that grow are enthusiastic and bold like Apollos, but are also prepared to tolerate people like Apollos who are still learning and who will accept learning because they know they are being corrected out of love.

How do we build a church like that in Alderley Edge? Who are our next generation of waterers who will work in God's field, trusting in him who gives the growth?