**January 22, 2023 1 Corinthians 1:10-18**

***Unity, Not Uniformity***

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 NRSV

*(10)Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. (11)For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. (12)What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." (13)Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (14)I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15)so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (16)(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) (17)For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. (18)For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*.

**Notes:**

1. When Christ trained his disciples there was only ***one*** church.
   1. Each ***denomination*** has things that separate them from each other.
   2. Different factions and divisions work ***against*** each other.
   3. Everything becomes political and therefore able to be ***manipulated***.
2. It is a wonder that this faith movement has ***survived***.
   1. The Church has been able ***thrive*** for nearly two thousand years.
   2. We are human beings and by nature we are ***sinful*** and ***unclean***.
3. The ***good*** news is that we are also the people of God.
   1. ***Work*** and ***pray*** for things to be as they should be.
   2. Set aside differences and ***unite*** with the same mind and same purpose.
   3. To be closer to the ***Lord*** means that we will draw nearer to each other.
   4. Focus on what we have in common and come to agreement in ***faith***.
4. Christian ***unity*** should not disqualify Christian truth.
   1. We must continue to look closely at the ***essentials***.
   2. Is ***salvation*** clearly taught as given through Jesus Christ?
   3. Do they stand firmly on the fact that we are saved by ***grace***?”
5. Not every Christian ***participates*** in worship the same way.
   1. We have ***differences*** in music preference.
   2. We have ***different*** preferences in Bible versions.
   3. We have ***differences*** in our preference of attire.
   4. We are all ***unique*** and think differently.
6. When Paul talks of one mind, he is speaking of ***unity*** not uniformity.
   1. Our ***unity*** is found in Jesus Christ.
   2. We are one in Christ through ***faith***.
   3. Come together in one ***mind*** and one ***purpose***.
   4. Live out what we already are, ***Christ’s*** ***Church***.

**Script:**

Turmoil, bickering, and infighting; three words that describe division within a group of people. In my life, I have learned that these things are never good things and many times are provoked by one party, or both parties involved, stemming from their desire to be on top, to be the one who is in control. I have seen these types of situations divide families, break up marriages, and destroy friendships.

Perhaps you have seen these types of things in your own family or friendships. Maybe you have experienced the frustration when you are caught in the middle of such conflict. Maybe you have been at the losing end of such turmoil. And, possibly, you were the cause of such situations. These types of situations usually involves 0ne or more persons who provoke such situations; at least one other person to resist the advances of the provoker; and then there are those who seem caught in the middle, those who do not want to take sides, or those who don’t care who wins this conflict.

As I said before we see these types of conflicts within families; we find them within groups of friends; and, we find them in our communities. But there is no place worse than when you find them within the church. These types of things are devastating to the body of believers and especially poisonous to congregations who find these things in their core. How many of us today can say we have seen the effects of such situations, overwhelm a body of believers and cause a great falling away from the church. I will tell you with all my heart, that it breaks when these things happen; especially within our community. This is why it is important for us to understand what Paul is saying in our passage this morning, in 1 Corinthians 1:10-18. Join me in the reading of this passage today.

*(10)Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. (11)For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. (12)What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." (13)Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (14)I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15)so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (16)(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) (17)For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. (18)For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*. *1 Corinthians 1:10-18 NRSV*

I read a story this week, a true story, told about a South African judge who was invited to attend the Maundy Thursday services at a church. This took place during the worst periods of the Apartheid; this judge knew that being white and accepting the invitation of a black minister would be risking his political career. This judge, attempting to be a good man, accepted, and upon arriving found that the service was to be a foot washing service and he was urged to participate. The time came when he was called forward and he was to wash the feet of a woman who had been a servant in his home for many years, thirty to be precise. As he knelt at her feet, he was taken back at how weary her feet looked from all of the years of service in his home. Greatly moved he took her feet in his hands and kissed them, and the woman began to weep, as did most everybody else in the room. Days later the newspaper got word of this and the Judge was ruined, he lost his political career. Paton added, “Perhaps he found his soul.”

There are many different denominations of the Christian church. When Christ trained his disciples there was only one church, the church of Jesus Christ. But as time went on, the teachings changed, according to the disciple’s perception of what Jesus taught. But then, as the different teachings traveled to new locations and different people, those who were hearing these teachings perceived and understood differently. Before we knew it there were two churches; the Catholic Church and the Orthodox church. As missionaries traveled and shared the message, again division overtook the believers and we found the Orthodox Church identified by the country in which it was located. The Catholic church dealt with priests who protested against some of the practices and rules that were put into place, and protestant reformation began which is where many of the protestant denominations come from. Those who believed in certain teachings and rules for baptism were called Baptists, those who followed the teachings of John Wesley, were referred to as Wesleyan, or Methodists. Those who tried to follow the teachings of Martin Luther were called Lutheran. Those who followed the teachings of Menno Simons were called Mennonites; and when the Mennonites became too worldly, a group of conservatives broke away and became what we know today as the Amish.

Each denomination of the Christian church has things that separate them from each other, otherwise we would still be one church. In some cases, one denomination will actually despise another. It seems that our desire to believe what we want to believe has created enough turmoil and bickering and fighting amongst the church that we actually despise each other at times. We argue over points of perception, rather than uniting under what we have in common. We ridicule and hate others because we cannot agree with our differences of opinion. That is what Paul is trying to stop today.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is both descriptive and prescriptive. He explains what is happening in that church and to many others, many like us here and now. What is going on in Corinth is simply different factions, divisions, working against each other in the congregation. It is reported to Paul by Chloe’s people that people are quarreling. When Paul writes to the Corinthians, he could be addressing his letter to so many congregations which are squabbling. Perhaps it is as author from Time Magazine, Lance Morrow writes, that one of the root problems of our culture today is that we have politicized everything. Everything becomes political and therefore able to be manipulated. We have “spin-doctors” “conspiracy theorists” working to shade the truth for political advantage. We have an intellectual political correctness that stifles new ideas or independent thought. We have an institutional political correctness which forbids anyone to “rock the boat.” What is true of the wider arena seems also to be true of the Church.

Look around the things happening in our world lately, how the Covid virus has been weaponized to be used to divide and control people. How racial tensions have accelerated over events in the news; villainizing the police and military; the very people who are called to serve and protect. And look at the religious landscape of our area. How conflict and the argumentative nature has put people at odds with those who are to be supportive. Unfortunately, the church is made up of people who are fallible; with all of their faults and shortcomings it is understandable that humans will politicize the things they are involved with. We don’t check our sinful nature when we walk in the doors of the church. In the eyes of many, it is a wonder that this faith movement has survived.

The strongest proof of the truth of Christianity, is the fact that the Christian church has been able to survive and even thrive for nearly two thousand years. Congregations today are not that much different than the church in Corinth. You look in many churches and you will find them riddled with factions, affected by difference, and given to quarrels. This is the reality in many places. We are human beings; fallen creatures; and by nature we are sinful and unclean.

So why should we try to live this Christian life? What I am hearing is that we are no better now than two thousand years ago? The good news is that we are also the people of God. Along with the description of our fault we also find a prescription for our cure. Never be satisfied with things as they are. Work and pray for things to be as they should be. Paul is very clear about this. He urges the Corinthians to set aside their differences and to unite with the same mind and same purpose; even with those we may be at odds with. The words used in Greek are very strong. Paul is appealing by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to these believers. The word even means “to beg.” Paul is begging people to set aside their grudges and set aside their grievances and work together to live out their faith in unity. We are called to be one with Christ and with each other. To be closer to the Lord means that we will draw nearer to each other; to draw closer to our fellow believers means that we have come nearer to the Lord.

Scholars have looked closely at the divisions in Corinth . Some of the Corinthians seemed to have followed Paul closely. Those who seemed to lean towards Apollos may have been more intellectual, more concerned with philosophy and rhetoric. Paul seems to suggest that he did not have such a refined Greek education. Still others who looked to Peter, may have had a Jewish background and looked to Peter and James as advocates of keeping the Jewish law as well as having Christian faith. Finally, there are those who would appeal directly to Christ. They may not have been as innocent as they would appear, but likely were enthusiasts, who believed they could discard the Scriptures, deny all laws and live according to their own insights. If one wanted, one could go through two thousand years of Christian history and find similar groups and viewpoints throughout. Even today there are different church bodies and congregations which emphasize one or another of these positions.

Paul is not saying that any one group is entirely wrong, but they should focus on what they have in common and come to an agreement in their faith. As they find themselves closer to each other, they come nearer to Christ. As they look to Christ and not their own opinions, they will come closer to each other. When they look at their commonalities, they will produce a common purpose which is to witness to the world about the love and power of Jesus. The unity of the Church is not only pleasing to God, but Christian unity is for the sake of the world. The unity of the Church results in a mission to a world longing for truth, forgiveness, meaning, salvation. All the energy spent quarreling could be better expended reaching out to others with the Gospel. All the time spent in conflict could be better spent helping people in need.

We need Paul’s rebuke. Undoubtedly, Christian unity should not disqualify Christian truth. Do not overlook differences which are very important. I do not agree with everything taught by the Presbyterians or Roman Catholics or Baptists. I am very uncomfortable with many things taught and emphasized by other denominations. But we must continue to look closely at the essentials. When we work with other Christians, we must ask ourselves, “Do they have the Bible and do they preach it? Do they let the Scriptures speak clearly and plainly without adding human ideas? Do they practice the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper? Is salvation clearly taught as it is given through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Do they stand firmly on the fact that we are saved by grace?”

Not every Christian participates in worship the same way or even thinks the same way. Likewise, not every Nazarene participates in worship in the same way or thinks the same way. Not everyone in this congregation does either, by no means! We have differences in music preference. Some of us like traditional hymns while others lean more towards the contemporary worship music; and then there are some of us in the middle who like the mix. We have different preferences in Bible versions. Some of us carry a King James Version of the Bible while others rely in the NIV and then there are some who have multiple versions which they switch back and forth through to get a better perspective of what Scripture says. We have differences in our preference of attire. Some people wear business attire, suit jackets and ties, while others wear more relaxed and casual clothing. We are all unique and think differently.

When Paul talks about having one mind, he is speaking of unity not uniformity. Our unity is not in our wisdom, our behavior, our background, but is found in Jesus Christ. It is God’s power in the cross of Jesus Christ that has formed us into a community. It is God’s power in the cross of Jesus Christ that sustains us on our life’s journey, that makes such different and unlikely folks’, brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are one in Christ through faith; we are one with each other since we have One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. If we come together in one mind and one purpose, then we live out what we already are, Christ’s Church, and then we become truly the people God wants us to be. As we accept each other, speak well of each other, interpret the actions of each other in the kindest way, and love each other, we come closer to Christ. As we learn and study and pray, we come closer to the cross of Christ and to each other. Amen.