

Be united in the same mind and in the same purpose

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1 Cor: 1

1Cor. 1:10 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.

I find today's reading from Corinthians as more than a little ironic as it comes on the heels of the inauguration of Donald Trump as the President of the United States. A time where we see deep divisions in our country and in our churches and the same divisions would be there if the election had turned out differently. The Facebook page dedicated to things we didn't learn in seminary has been filled with clergy trying to wrestle with how to move forward when even an seemingly innocent quote from scripture to point out a social issue is considered partisan.

Fortunately we have the blessing of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. We will be reading from Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth every Sunday from now until Lent begins in March. So what is so important about this book? After spending an entire semester studying this letter I believe it is the most relevant book in the bible for today's world for in many respects we are Corinth.

Gordon Fee called Corinth, New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas all rolled into one. Corinth was a key port city during the time of the Greeks that was destroyed by Rome and then re-established with Roman freedmen around 34BC. Corinth was a combination of sacred and profane. There were 26 temples and religious sites to a variety of gods from all over the world, but Corinth was also a town renowned for sexual sin. To behave like a Corinthian meant to be of low moral standards. This was a commercial crossroads for both sailors and merchants.

The church and the city was made up mostly of Greeks and Romans and we can see that from the names Paul uses in not only today's passage but the rest of the letter. There were very few Jews in this early church. Paul first visited the city in 51-52. First Corinthians is dated about three years later.

There were not only divisions and factions, but challenges to Paul's authority to lead the church in Corinth. The letter may be a combination of several responses to letters written not only by Chloe, but by Stephanas (who was mentioned today) Fortunatus and Achaicus. We do not know exactly what Chloe's people were complaining about, but we can guess given the areas Paul addresses.

In addition to the challenges to his authority he had to convince them to change some of their theology. We forget that in the early church many of the doctrines, teachings and principles we take for granted were still very early in the formation stage. Many would not surface for centuries. The early church was not some blessed unified group of followers, but people trying to work out what following Jesus meant. The term Christian was not even common yet and the fish, the sign of Jonah not the cross was the symbol.

The first and foremost issue is the division within the church and that is where I want to start today. On this weekend where we inaugurated a new president there are certainly deep divisions in our country and in our church. All one has to do is follow the arguments about the National Cathedral's choir singing at the inauguration and the Cathedral hosting the Saturday prayer service.

I could spend a great deal of time on the divisions and what they are. However rather than focus on division, I suggest we focus on what Paul speaks of in his opening. "Now I appeal to all of you to be in agreement without divisions among you, united in the same mind and in the same purpose." What is the point or points where we can be united? For that I would like to go back and focus on what is the core of our call as Christians and for that I want to turn to the words of Jesus. When asked what is the greatest commandment he answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might and the second is like unto it. Love your neighbor as yourself. On these hang all the law and the prophets."

On these should hang all that we do and say. The clearest expression of how this work on a practical basis is found in our baptismal covenant. In particular they are found in the promises that we make every time we reaffirm the promises. I have referenced these before this fall especially right after the election, but I do not think it hurts us to look at them again since we did not get to say them on Jan 8 because of the snow. These baptismal promises are renewed on the first Sunday after Epiphany when there is a baptism. If we do not have a baptism we do them anyway since this is the Sunday where we read the story of the baptism of Jesus.

However before we get to the promises we say the Apostle's Creed. In that creed we say the we believe in the catholic church or in the Creed we say the one holy catholic church. This should be a point of unity. In speaking about this Richard Rohr wrote this week:

The word catholic comes from the Greek kata (meaning "through" or "throughout") and holos (meaning "whole"). This word was originally used by Ignatius of Antioch as early as the year 100 to precisely include all Christians,

and it is a shame that it later was used to create boundaries rather than to be inclusive.¹

Yet when Wendy was teaching Intro to Religious studies at John Carroll University in Cleveland she would often have Roman Catholic students ask if Protestants were Christian. All because they had been taught that only the elect get into heaven. We see this in many denominations and it is sad. We fall into our tribes that insist we are right and others are wrong. This is exactly what was going on in Corinth. This is probably why Ignatius of Antioch used the word the way he did for this problem has been around for a long time.

Then we get into the 5 promises.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? This means we stay in community and gather each week break bread and to pray. Christianity is a communal religion not a solo journey.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? This means that we acknowledge and know that we will sin and that we will be put in a position of resisting evil. Sin is the breaking of relationship with God, another person or creation. That is a pretty broad area and as it says, when not if we fall into sin we repent. There is a reason we say the confession every week. God knows I need it.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? This gets back the great commandment that I just quoted a few moments ago. We have good news to share in the Jesus came for our salvation now in this life and in the next. We promise to show that love of neighbor in our words and our deeds.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? For me these two are at the heart of the issue. Justice, peace among people and respecting the dignity of all people whether they be a president or the homeless man I passed on the street the other day in downtown Norfolk. If there is a place where we can begin and should be able to agree it is respecting each person for the child of God that all people are. Acknowledging that everyone and everything is loved by God and we are called to love them as we love ourselves even when they make us crazy.

You can laugh but that is the heart of the issue. Loving the lovable, our friends is not hard. Loving someone who causes you pain is another matter. Jesus did not like what the Pharisees did, but he did love them as children of God. This is not a case of love the sinner hate the sin. Contrary to popular belief that is not found in the bible. Love the person, love the world enough to stand up for what is right that is the essence. This

¹<http://email.cac.org/t/ViewEmail/d/C8A308061A0ACA90/BBC62F1EC1C6D196C68C6A341B5D209E>

means loving the person enough to acknowledge that while we may disagree with them, that does not make the other a bad person.

The retired bishop of Atlanta said to the clergy here last fall, “We need to disagree while walking towards each other.” The people in Corinth were disagreeing and walking away from each other. Today, too many people in our country and our church are disagreeing and walking away from each other. We need to disagree and walk towards each other to rebuild the bonds that unite us. In following the commands of Christ we must be in agreement without division, in the same mind and in the same purpose, following Jesus, living those baptismal promises in order to bring healing to our broken world. On that let us be united.