**1 Corinthians 1:10-18 January 26, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the continuation of our Epistle lesson from last week, 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 10 through 18 here re-reading these words. “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The church in Corinth lacked nothing, and yet there was quarreling. Divisions, clichés, groups that are opposed to each other, even from the very beginning of the formation of the church they suffered from this problem. Abraham Lincoln famously said in one of his speeches, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Wise words from a leader who was facing the challenge of uniting a country that had been through a Civil War. But President Lincoln didn’t just make up these words, they appear in Matthew 12:25. “But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.” President Lincoln was quoting the words of Jesus Christ. Paul was echoing Jesus’ teaching in 1 Corinthians 1:10 where he talks about everyone being in agreement and that there be no divisions among us. But why were they quarreling, fighting and divided?

What do churches quarrel about? Why are people divided? Is there ever a lasting unity in a church where everyone is in perfect agreement like Paul is talking about here in 1 Corinthians chapter 1? There can’t be. Not as long as sin exists in our world. The church isn’t a place for perfect individuals instead the church is made up of sinners. Sinners working with sinners to go about the business of God’s mission which is to reach out to a world of sinners and welcome them to a place of comfort and peace in the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ our Lord. The church quarrels about any number of things. I’m sure you can find divisions about anything in churches all around the world today. Matters of preference, of cosmetic preferences, or music preferences, of building preferences, worship preferences, you can argue and be divided about anything. The congregation is divided, area churches get divided and quarrel with each other about this or that, some supposed slight or disrespect, something some member did to another member on a softball field, or yes, even potentially a bad call in a dartball game. Circuits are then quarreling and upset at each other. Go to a District convention and you will see division and quarreling, voting delegates at microphones arguing for different positions, there isn’t uniformity in voting as there has to be runoffs in elections and you have to keep voting over and over and over again until there is a majority, and on the Synodical level it’s the same thing. Division, arguing, quarreling, groups of people who are set against each other in the church. Which is the most depressing thought because you look around at our world today and you have a country that feels just as divided as when Abraham Lincoln quoted Jesus about a house that is divided and how it can’t stand. A world where we have given in to tribalism and the message is clear, “think like we do or you are wrong.” On any subject, from politics, to entertainment preferences, to brand supremacy, and on and on and on, we fight, we argue, we leave comments, we retreat further into our own groups, our own tribes and we vilify the others and make them the problem, we are a society of division. And we want unity, but not at the price of our own preferences. If we won’t find peace in society, and we won’t find peace and unity even in the church, then it has to beg the question, does it even exist?

And the answer is a resounding yes! Because what Paul is talking about here in regards to unity doesn’t apply to every small aspect of a Christian congregation. He’s talking about unity in the sole focus of our worship, in the sole focus of our praise, in the foundation of all that we believe and do. Hear the words of Psalm 29:2, “Ascribe to **The Lord** the glory due his name, worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.” Ascribe means to “attribute something to” or “give credit to” and when it comes to our worship and our lives all of that credit goes to the Lord, Jesus Christ. There can be no division about that amongst us. We are Christians. We follow Christ, believe in Christ, love Christ and obey Christ. That’s our identity, that’s what we do, it’s why this church exists, to give honor to God, to have a place of worship where we can gather together and receive from God the gifts he is so happy to give to us, in the Sacraments and in His Word. Which means that this church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and not the man who stands in this pulpit.

Because that was the cause of the division in the church in Corinth. They were divided on who deserves the praise. Verse 12, “What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” This is the source of their problems, and in the Greek it is represented with the repetition of the word, “Ego” which is “I”. When you are on a team it can’t be all about you. You have to work with others around you, you have to find compromise for there to be any lasting unity. The church was divided on their leader. Some followed Paul. Paul had preached and worked with the church, and therefore they thought that Paul was a big deal and very important in their spiritual lives. Apollos was a speaker in the area who also had worked with the congregation and so some preferred him over Paul. If you look throughout Church history, you will find that Paul actually wasn’t said to be a very engaging public speaker. People enjoyed reading his letters and found them engaging, but when he would actually come and speak it was said that he was very to the point and not very entertaining. Apollos was the opposite; he was a very popular speaker and so people gravitated toward him. Some were following Cephas, also known as Simon Peter, the apostle. The idea was that Peter had baptized some of the members of the church while he was passing through, and they were using that as a means of saying that they were “holier” or “better” because they had been baptized by this apostle. And the last group are those that Paul designates as following Christ. We hear this and we like to think, “Finally, the good ones, they were doing the right thing.” But some scholars have found that there was a group, albeit the smallest among the Corinthians, that didn’t necessarily believe in Christ as we would think meaning that they were true Christians, but instead they insisted that they heard special revelations from Christ that they tried to pass off as the highest and greatest authority among the people. Instead of recognizing Paul’s authority in the church, or even Peter’s as an apostle, where Jesus had passed authority down to them, they claimed to have a special authority from Christ himself as well, with nothing to back it up. It would be equivalent if you were called to be a witness in a murder trial, and you claimed you could speak for the victim of the murder because they were talking to you from the grave.

Their church was divided, and Paul could even be tempted to elevate himself because he was one of the candidates of their praise. But he points not to himself, despite his faithfulness to them, and he doesn’t point to the one who has eloquent words of wisdom, he doesn’t point to Peter that they think that the church should be built on the foundation of an earthly man or position of authority within the church, and he doesn’t point to a superstitious revelation of Jesus Christ, instead he points to the cross. Verse 17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” See the change. Paul goes from the problem which is, “I do this, I follow that, I, I, I” and moves at the end of the section to “us.” We, who are being saved, believe in the power of God found in the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross brings unity, in the midst of division, because it shows the ultimate remedy for the separation of sin. The cross dispels the smaller, inconsequential disagreements, because in the cross we see ourselves for what we are, sinners. We see the price that had to be paid to save us from eternal destruction. We also see the love of God in that he sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to that fate, and to that pain, in order to save all of us. That brings us together, to forgive each other, work with each other, compromise with each other and find a common ground in the love that we have as God’s own children.

We are united in Christ, the most important aspect of our lives of faith. There can be no division there. But when Paul writes these words, he’s not saying that we agree on every aspect of this church. Disagreement and different opinions don’t have to mean a complete and total breakdown of our unity. We work together, we give each other the benefit of the doubt, we find common ground and we compromise and move forward. We all have a voice, and that voice is heard and not disregarded. We make our voices heard and we vote, but when we find division and disagreement, we can’t give in to quarreling and fighting, and undermining. We must give in to the unity and love we share as brothers and sisters in Christ. We must not be divided on doctrine, on the core teachings of our Church, on the stuff that matters more than anything else. We must pray together, worship together, sing together, and learn together. That is our calling, that is what this church is all about, growing together and serving the Lord, it’s our mission and focus because in it we imitate Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen