

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

There were two unmarried sisters who had such a bitter fight that they stopped speaking to each other. Unable or unwilling to leave their small home, they continued to use the same rooms and sleep in the same bedroom. A chalk line divided the sleeping area into two halves. The chalk divided rooms so that both sisters could come and go and get her own meals without trespassing on their sister's space. In the black of night, each could hear the breathing and snoring of the foe. For years they coexisted in grinding silence. Neither was willing to take the first step to reconciliation.

Then one night one sister got up to go to the bathroom and fell, breaking her hip. The other sister awakened by the fall and the scream of pain jumped out of bed crossed the chalk line and came to her sister's side. After a few typical sister jabs at why she would do such a foolish thing as trip on her own feet, the sister held her foe of the past few years until the paramedics came and carried her to the hospital with her sister at her side. In those moments of darkness came the truth and power of love and light. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall told this story with these words. "The legal system can force open doors, and sometimes even knock down walls, but it cannot build bridges. That job belongs to you and me."

In last week's text, I talked about how Paul established his credentials as he reminded the church at Corinth of who he was and what right he had to say the things that he would be saying in this letter to them. Corinth was a church dealing with division as we will soon see. Paul doesn't waste any time in getting

to his main point... the main issue... the issue is division. The issue is factionalism. The issue is us vs them, left vs right, good guys vs bad guys. The issue is that the church has begun to reflect the larger society around it. Rather than living as an example of what community is supposed to be, we have shifted into the same sorts of line drawing and team choosing that the rest of our culture revels in. "Now I appeal to you," Paul pleads, stop it! Stop being a *mirror* and start being a *lighthouse*. Stop trying to blend in and start standing out, standing apart.

Then he does a little diagnosis (well, after sharing how he knows what he knows). It is hard to tell why he felt the need to include his source in the letter. Perhaps he was trying to add some authenticity to his account. One hopes it didn't cause problems for Chloe or her people!

The problem that Paul identifies has to do with allegiances. To whom do we belong? On the one hand, it seems simple. Of course, we belong to Christ; that's how we would answer the question if we were asked. But Paul isn't interested in what we say; he's interested in what we *do*, how we *live*. And how the church in Corinth is living right now does not reflect the allegiance to Christ and Christ's Lordship.

Paul is asking for a profound humility to govern the behaviors of the body of Christ followers. He even diminishes his actions with his "senior moment" of whom he has baptized.

It's not about *me*, he declares to them. It's about *him*, the Christ who calls Paul and who calls the *community of faith* in Corinth.

So, set aside all those other allegiances and cling to the one who gives life. Be like him.

Be like him in his *humility*.

Be like him in his *suffering*.

Be like him in his *death*.

Paul introduces the cross in this text. It is introduced as a call to humility. The cross is foolishness to the world, Paul declares. Foolish in its *shame*. Foolish in its *embarrassment*.

Who would claim the cross as a symbol of anything, let alone victory? The cross is not just the worst way to die, it is the lowest, reserved for the wretched refuse. The cross is the empire's means of taking out the garbage. Who would claim the cross?

We do, says Paul. We do because we see the power of God at work. "God took what is low and despised in the world . . ." That's coming later; this is a preview. For now, Paul says, the cross is the power of God, for those of us being saved.

Being saved.

Those of *us*.

There is a process here, and a *commonality*. We're in this together. Let's not be choosing sides; let's not be building barriers, creating an us and a them. Let's be building bridges, as Justice Marshall says. Let's have the same mind and the same purpose.

That's the difficulty isn't it? We don't have the same mind; we don't agree on everything. Sometimes we wonder if we agree on anything. We see it in the division that we have in our communities, in our nation, in our world. We see it in the endless political debates that are sometimes even splitting up families just like the two sisters that I mentioned in the opening of this sermon. We even see it in the church... especially in the church. And as we are seeing in Paul's letters, these divisions go back to the very beginning.

Now, Paul will emphasize the beauty of diversity in the congregation... the diversity of people and the diversity of gifts of the Spirit... all of which are

necessary for the body of Christ to do what is required as we respond to the needs of the world and transform the world for Christ.

So, is he really asking the church to think only one thing? Or is the emphasis not on a particular theology or interpretation, but on a mission that loves God and neighbor... period? The singularity that Paul calls for is vital.

There is an odd moment in the text. We can clearly understand why Paul condemns the “I belong to Paul” or “I belong to Apollos” or “I belong to Cephas.” But what’s wrong with the “I belong to Christ”? // Isn’t that the whole idea? Why does he seem to claim that those touting the “I belong to Christ” slogan are just as divisive as the others? //

Perhaps it comes down to the pronoun.

*I* belong to Christ.

Paul is all about community, all about being a body with many separate parts working together for the good of the whole.

His “yous” are almost always “all y’alls.”

The complaint is about the “in your face” attitude that *separates*, rather than the *humility* that invites and welcomes.

“We belong to Christ” is an invitational phrase. It is a welcoming phrase. It is a uniting phrase.

We’re not trying to live into something that we’re not.

We’re being invited to live into what we can become if we can just remember not *who* we are, but *whose* we are. And we are a child of the living God, loved and accepted despite our misgivings and our thoughts to the contrary.

The body of Christ is diverse. The body of Christ is multilingual; the body of Christ is multihued; the body of Christ is multigenerational and mutigendered.

The body of Christ is open to everybody and it needs - we need - everyone and their gifts - to be the people that we are called to be.

We are not in this venture alone and we need everyone around us under the direction and leadership of the Holy Spirit to live into the same mind and same purpose that puts Jesus at the center of who we are and who we are meant to be... using the gifts that we have been given by God so that we can make a difference in this world.

The divisions are real. They were then and they are now. They unnerve us because we are human. We get distracted and we like to be in control... in fact we hate to give up our feeling of control even when we are out of control. But when our focus is placed where it should be: on Jesus, the Christ, who gave everything so that we might have life... Jesus who invites us into a life changing and world changing relationship where we are loved in spite of what we have done, where we are forgiven even when we can't forgive ourselves, where we are healed, and where we are made whole by the power of Jesus in our life... even in our brokenness... especially in our brokenness.

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But that all y'all be united in the same mind and the same purpose in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

All of us... together... in the same mind and same purpose.

Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.