

Scripture and Message from 22 January 2023

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 NIV

¹⁰Now 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. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹²What 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."

¹³Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so 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.) ¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸For 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.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Message: Have the Same Mind

I believe that I have told you about my love/hate relationship with Paul. The man was a genius. His theology about Jesus, his Christology, is clear and precise. "I preach only Christ and him crucified." If the resurrection didn't happen, then we Christians are to be the most pitied." These two statements are the foundation stones in Christian belief. Paul also had a lot to say about how we are to organize ourselves as a church. His theology on church, his ecclesiology, is not as clear as his Christology, but it is also the standard by which we still judge church today.

And so, we read Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, a church with arguments and divisions and we hear Paul telling them and us that we need to "have the same mind."

When I hear Paul tell me to "Have the same mind," as all the rest of the churches I think, okay, yes, well. Maybe. But..really, Paul? I mean, I guess having the same mind as other Christians is perhaps within the realm of possibility. But really it just seems out of reach. I don't think all of the churches in Dryden can "have the same mind" much less in the United States, or across the world. Or maybe it's that we have decided that this isn't all that important. Or not as important as being right, standing firm, holding on to principles and doctrines. In our hierarchy of behaviors, maybe having the same mind isn't very high on the list of what is important for the church in 2023.

Yet just reading verse 10 will tell us how seriously Paul takes it as he makes his approach to all that is going on in the church at Corinth. "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" (1 Corinthians 1:10 NRSV).

How many times does he say the same thing in that single verse? "Be in agreement" and "no divisions among you" and "be united in the same mind" and "the same purpose." All repetitions or at best nuances of the same idea. For Paul, what is tearing the church apart is the fact that they don't agree. And -huh- the same thing

is still happening today. Look at what is going on in our own denomination. We can't agree on what is fundamental to being church together, so we are tearing ourselves apart.

But what does Paul mean when he tells us to have the same mind? He doesn't seem to be all that keen in telling us exactly what it means. Does it mean that we have to agree on every single point of doctrine and ethics? Does it mean that we have to read the scriptures in exactly the same way every time? Does it mean that there is absolutely no room for differences or nuance? That you have to apply the word to your life in exactly the same way that I apply the word in mine?

There are those who would argue that this doctrinal lockstep is what he is talking about. But then these folk might also agree that there can be differences in application or in priorities. Differences seem inevitable when dealing with human beings who are made differently and who have different experiences and histories. Where is the line, then? How do we know when we've drifted from the accepted thought process?

What if we back up a moment and ask what Paul might have had in mind when he told the church in Corinth to be of the same mind? The first thing to note is that he addresses them as "brothers and sisters, [or siblings]." He uses a familial reference, even when trying to correct their behavior or at least their thinking about their behavior. "Brothers and sisters," he says. We are connected, we are united, we are the family that was created not by blood, but by the life and witness and death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Even in a conflicted situation, there needs to be a sense of connection, a belief in community.

So, might we say that being of the same mind is that we all agree that our primary effort is in building up the body; or as Commander Spock said to his friend Admiral Kirk in the second Star Trek film – "the needs of the many, outweigh the needs of the few, or the one." (I know, he wasn't the first to say that, but it was a moving scene, you must admit.) So, does this mean that we surrender truth? Or right? In favor of just sticking together no matter what? Of course not. Paul is writing this letter to correct behaviors and understandings that he argues are wrong, not of Christ, he says.

But it does mean that there are ways we will go about making our arguments; there are behaviors that we will not accept as we seek reconciliation and new understandings. We won't tear one another down; we won't call names and point fingers; and we certainly won't tell others not in the community what terrible people we are saddled with in the body of Christ. There is a call to a high behavior, no matter how frustrated or upset we get. There is nothing here about giving up trying to find ways of coming to a common mind. Just as our political speech has become nasty, so too has the way we talk about Christians that do not believe the same as us – who do not have the same mind. And I can be terrible about this – it is difficult for me not to "talk trash" about some of my siblings in faith that I believe make the Christian name synonymous with ignorant, right-wing, bigot.

But Paul goes on to say, and this is key: that we listen as well as speak. "Where does that come from?" The next verses: "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Cephas" or Apollos or Christ. (Wait, Christ? Hang on we'll come back to that one.) What this sounds like is what psychologists call "confirmation bias." We listen only to

the ones who confirm what we already believe. We aren't challenged to look at something in another way. We exist in our echo chambers, repeating our understandings and our beliefs, rather than digging deeper into the source of those beliefs and being willing to be challenged to another way of thinking or applying our faith and knowledge. Doesn't this sound familiar. Isn't this how we have become so divided on just about everything in our country from what to eat, whether science is factual, to what is reality.

In Corinth we have the different factions, Paul, Cephas, Apollos and Christ, instead of red and blue .Okay, Paul, Cephas and Apollos, maybe. But Christ? Why did Paul include that name on this list? As if there was some problem with saying, "I'm following Christ."

Actually, it seems as though that one should be the antidote to the problems, rather than an additional division or a separate camp to follow. And that would be true in the best of situations. We can and should always call upon Christ to be the arbiter of our disputes and disagreements and multiple interpretations. **Except that too often, we claim Christ as one who always agrees with me but not with you. And that to disagree with me is to disagree with Christ. The other side is not just wrong, but they are anti-Christ,** which is about the worst thing we can think to say about them. This is the rhetoric I have seen being used against people – siblings in Christ – brothers and sisters – who believe differently.

Christ is not our exclusive property, no matter how "right" we might be. We cannot claim that only we follow Christ, even as we seek to communicate the Christ we have come to know. And to vilify Christians who believe differently, even as they vilify us, is just a small step from the Inquisition, or the witch trials, or perhaps the McCarthy trials and blacklisting people for what they believe or how they behave when it does not line up exactly with our own beliefs. *I believe this is what makes God cry.*

As a parent, I do not need my children to believe the exact same things. In fact, I think it would be creepy if they acted the same. I do not have the same relationship with each of them, because they are different, and again, it would be creepy. But I do want them to love each other and care about each other. I do want them to listen to each other and not fight with each other. I can only believe that God wants the same for all of us that call ourselves children of God, siblings in Christ. I believe that for Paul, 'being of the same mind' has more to do with how we treat each other, both publicly and privately, than it does with all of us thinking exactly the same way.

My invitation for you and for me is to try and treat all of my siblings in Christ, even those I do not like, with respect. And perhaps even love. I am not there yet. I resent people who I believe give Christianity a bad name and reputation. But I believe God – through Paul's writings are calling me – calling us – toward an attitude of love.