

**“God is faithful”**: Those are the words we left off with last week. St. Paul wrote, **“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:9)**. The Lord called us into his fellowship, a relationship that is more true, more real than even the relationship a child has with his or her own parents. But God's not done. There's more to this fellowship than what's going on between us and our personal relationship with the Lord. This morning we're going to talk about what this fellowship has to do with our walk with God and especially with one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### 1st CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” <sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the Cross of Christ would not be made void.

Paul wrote, **“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:10)**. Notice how he affectionately calls the readers “brethren” or brothers. Thirty-nine times he used that expression in this letter. He wanted them to start thinking about each other as relation, as siblings with one Father in Heaven.

In Corinth, in the day, debate and rhetoric were favorite pastimes. The people took pride in their intellectual abilities. They would argue among themselves for hours on any topic—sports, politics, religion, it didn't matter. They would choose opposing sides just for the fun of arguing.

But in the church this was no joke as the people started taking up loyalties based on who had baptized them or led them to Christ, loyalties they apparently took very seriously.

I have told you about a church I once attended. Everything was great until I made the mistake of going to a voters' assembly. That's when I learned that there were the building-people—everything for them was about the preservation of the historic structure of the church—and there were the music-people, whose interests were in the choir and musicians. After watching them yell and scream at each other for an hour, I thought the greatest enemy in the church is surely not the devil or the world, but it is the church itself.

Faith has had its own problems, so we understand Paul's plea to the people that there be **"no divisions"** among them.

In the Greek, the word **"divisions"** means to "tear," as in to rip a shirt in half, to shred a garment into pieces. But Paul suggests an alternative. He writes, **"be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment"** (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:10b).

Look at our country today: For as long as we follow our natural human impulses, we will tear ourselves apart, into hundreds, into thousands of fragments of what once was a united whole. The United States of America is a community based on the universal acceptance of the idea of a common good rooted in the democratic process, the equality of all people, and the rule of law, and if we disregard these things, we will self-destruct.

The same principles apply to the church. Paul expanded on his idea of unity in the church when he later wrote to the church in Rome, **Romans 15:5-6**, **"may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Have you ever thought about worship like that, that we meet here weekly to receive God's "**perseverance and encouragement**" that we might be united in our thoughts and in our will so that when we speak, we speak with "**one voice**," a voice that glorifies God?

On his way to the Cross, Jesus prayed for us that we, **John 17:21**, "**may all be one**," and that just as he and the Father were one, that we might be one with them "**so that the world may believe**."

It is in our nature to gossip and bicker, to fight and to get our own way, even if it kills us. But this is not God's way. Thus he filled us with his Spirit, binding us together in his own heart.

In the Corinthian church, Paul saw that each person had had his own spiritual mentor or hero. The people were saying, "**I am of Paul**," and "**I of Apollos**," and "**I of Cephas**," and "**I of Christ**" (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:12**). Notice the use of the pronoun, "I." The people's self-centeredness was obvious. They were still "**fleshly**," as he describes them later (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3:3**).

But brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been transformed from the self-centeredness which our human nature naturally craves into one body, the Body of Christ.

Paul wrote, "**Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**" (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:13**). The idea that one man's death could save another person from death is a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. The idea that men and women, creatures condemned by their own cravings and passions, could be born anew, reconciled to God and one another with water and a promise is absolutely ludicrous in the eyes of the world. But these two things, Christ's crucifixion and our baptisms are the very foundation of everything we are as a community knit together in "**Spirit and truth**" (**John 4:24**).

Paul asked the rhetorical question, "**Has Christ been divided?**" That question is rhetorical because we know the answer: No, Christ has not been divided, as in, there is only "**One Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>One God and Father of all, who**

**is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:5-6).** Because our Lord is one he cannot be divided and thus the church cannot be divided either. That means that when the church is divided, it’s man’s fault, and the people need to be reconciled to God and to one another so that they can be church again.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God is with us, and it is his will, it is his nature, it is his sanctifying work in and among us to make us one just as he is one, so that, in the words of Paul, **“the Cross of Christ (will) not be made void” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:17).**

This week let us give thanks for the crucifixion of Jesus, that he died for our sins and rose from the grave that we might live in his light forever.

Let us give thanks for our baptism, that we received the benefits of the Cross through this gift.

Let us pray for our church, that we may be one, just as God is one.

And let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.