



Third Sunday after the Epiphany (A) - 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Focus: *A divided Christ?*

word of life

“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.” Has Christ been divided?” (1 Corinthians 1:12 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians with a brief salutation, but then launches into his deep concern about the conflicts within the church established in Corinth. At the time of the letter, these conflicts had not severed the congregation into separate entities. Thus, Paul writes a single letter to believers in Corinth to address his unease about the quarrels tearing at the fabric of the young church.

“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 you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” (1 Corinthians 1:10 NRSV) Paul’s appeal is to be understood as from more than him personally, but from Jesus Christ.

1. *What about this appeal might have caught the attention of the Corinthians?*
2. *How realistic is it to expect a congregation to be without conflicts?*
3. *Describe what it would feel like to be part of a church united in the same mind and purpose.*

It is interesting to note Paul heard the news about the conflicts in the Corinth church from Chloe’s people. We don’t know anything about this woman named Chloe, but she and those associated with her must have been considered a reliable source because Paul acts upon their information by writing a letter.

The primary conflict in Corinth stems from people claiming loyalty to Christian leaders other than Jesus Christ. Paul lists the factions—those who claimed to belong to Paul, Apollos, and Cephas—but concludes the list with those who belong to Jesus Christ. Paul raises an important and pain-filled question, “Has Christ been divided?”

4. *How would you answer the question, “Has Christ been divided?” How so?*
5. *Explain how all baptized believers belong to Jesus Christ.*

Paul asks several questions hoping to show the absurdity of those who claim allegiance to anyone but Christ. “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13 NRSV) Paul clearly knows it is Christ alone who was crucified. Christians are baptized solely in his name. One can almost picture Paul throwing up his hands in disgust as he writes, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.” (1 Corinthians 1:14 NRSV)

It is not that Paul is opposed to baptizing people, but that is not his primary calling from God. Nor is Paul interested in developing a fan club for himself. Instead Paul is called to proclaim the gospel of a crucified Christ—a message understood as foolishness to many. Paul’s proclamation is not just for those when they first hear of Christ, but also for congregations struggling to be a unified, vibrant body of Christ. The image of a divided Christ is a painful one. Jesus has already suffered on the cross and rose from the dead. Need Christ also suffer from divisions in the body of Christ known as the church?

6. *What is Paul trying to get the Corinthians to understand?*

Word among us

Is Christ divided? This question posed by Paul to the Corinthians is a worthy question for our time as well. Just ask anyone seeking to learn more about Christianity—especially someone without an affiliation with any specific denomination. Non-Christians are confused by divisions among those who claim a loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Take a moment to reflect on different church denominations which you have visited for worship, weddings, or perhaps funeral services. Consider church buildings in your neighborhood and community—ones you might pass by on your way to your own home congregation.

1. *List different denominations of churches who claim a connection to Christ.*
2. *Which of these are most similar to your congregation? How so?*
3. *Describe specific ways churches might differ in worship, music, theology, art, and architecture.*

There is no denying the diversity among churches which gather on Sunday mornings to sing praises to God who brought Jesus Christ into the world to redeem our sins and give us eternal life. All claim loyalty to Jesus Christ. Yet, sometimes relationships between Christian groups can be hostile.

4. *If a non-Christian would ask you to explain the diversity of churches, what would you say?*

The annual *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* is an international ecumenical observance from January 18 (Confession of St. Peter) to January 25 (Conversion of St. Paul). Christians are reminded to pray for unity so that the body of Christ—the church—not be divided. During his last supper with the disciples, Jesus offered this prayer, “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17: 22-23 NRSV)

5. *How might the church become completely one?*
6. *What are ways your congregation might collaborate and cooperate with other nearby congregations?*
7. *What opportunities might be created to expand your horizons and fellowship with a church diverse from your own congregation?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Each of us has probably had pastors who blessed our lives through sermons, words of encouragement, and presence. We thank God for those preachers and teachers who have walked with us on our spiritual journey and helped to shape us as we matured in faith. But, we do not belong to these pastors—even the one who baptized us. No matter how charismatic or memorable our pastors might be, we belong to Christ alone. It is Christ who has claimed us in our baptism.

8. *Which pastors have helped you to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ?*
9. *What does it mean for you to belong to Jesus Christ?*

Prayer

Gracious God, unite your church in the same mind and the same purpose of Jesus Christ. Amen

last word

Be intentional about learning something new about Christians who worship differently than you.

Daily Faith Practices

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