

**1 Corinthians 1:10-17** <sup>10</sup> Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. <sup>12</sup> Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? 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> lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. <sup>16</sup> Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, 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 with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

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Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Members of the Evangelical Free Church, Episcopalians, Methodists, all right here in Ellsworth. Move to larger city and you can add to that list tens if not hundreds of different types of churches one can attend. And yet Paul has the audacity in our text to exhort us that there should be no divisions among us as Christians. Can he really be serious? And if he is, will we take him seriously?

Encouraged by this text and others which encourage unity in the Christian church, the so-called modern ecumenical movement has its own idea of how to accomplish such unity. It asserts that each church must blind its eyes to the differences they have with one another, and focus instead on the similarities. And while you may never have even heard of the so called ecumenical movement, you certainly have heard someone express its core beliefs in words something like, "It doesn't matter what church you are at, as long as you go somewhere. As long as you believe in God, it is okay." Yes, it is easy to believe in the church culture that we live in today that the only real difference between the churches is the name on the door, and perhaps the way in which they worship. This is the prevailing attitude in our world, in the church at large, and it seems also in our community as well. After all, we all essentially believe the same thing, right? Essentially, there is no difference between all of these churches, right? Or is there?

Well before we even delve into that very important question, let's return to our text. How is it that Paul encouraged the Corinthians to reach unity? Was it by agreeing to disagree as most church leaders of our day suggest? No, Paul says unity is established when we all speak the same thing. Unity is not something to be assumed or imagined, but something to be accomplished by making sure that we as the Christian church are believing and speaking the same things.

This is the way the early church sought unity. The early church wrote creeds and met together in councils to accomplish such unity. Those creeds and those councils were written and convened for the sake of clarifying what the true faith was and therefore, also clarifying what is was not.

The modern day Christian Church has no such venue to meet all together to clarify such issues. And while that is a problem in itself, the real problem in that most of the church has no real interest in any event that would seek to clarify the faith in concrete ways. The Christian Church as a whole in our day wishes to allow anyone to believe anything they wish theologically, at least within reason. And this attitude has left the church as a whole a mess. The sad truth is that the various churches in our community do not all believe and teach the same things. Each church is left to proclaim their teaching as that of scripture, and no real discussion of the difference between the churches even happens.

Some of the church bodies represented in our own community believe that one must add their own works and the merits of the saints to what Christ did on the cross to be sure of their salvation. Others teach that only if you can identify the moment you sincerely made a decision for the Lord can you be certain of your salvation. And we as Lutherans say we can do nothing to assure ourselves of salvation, God has done it all. And we believe that, God through means like water and words, and bread and wine, gives that salvation freely to us. Others think it ridiculous to assert that an almighty God would use such earthy, simple means. Still other believe that these same things we celebrate are our way of making things right with God rather than His making thing right with us.

Dear friends, we are not speaking the same things. And our Lord grieves over this situation. He wishes that all of those baptized into Christ would say the same thing, proclaim the same Lord. But that is not where we are. And we simply must come to terms with this fact. For this is the first step in working toward unity. Yes first, we must admit that we do not have it. We must put aside this idea that we all believe the same things. For it simply is not true.

Next, Paul tells us that is we truly want unity, we must be willing to put aside our church heroes. Paul says in our text that if we each claim a different leader as our basis of existing, it only cause further divison. Rather, we must find our reason for existing in the Word incarnate and the Word written. Quite frankly, this is

why Luther hated the idea of having a church calling itself Lutheran. In his exact, and characteristically earthy words, Luther said, “How then should I –poor stinking maggot fodder that I am- come to have men call the children of God by my wretched name.”

For friends, if being a Lutheran means following Luther, we are to be pitied above all men. For we were not baptized into his name, were we? And he did not go to the cross for us, did he? So then why in the world do we call ourselves Lutherans? We do so because Luther before and us now speak the same things. We both believed that the word of God alone determines our beliefs. We both believe that Word teaches us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus alone on the cross. And finally, we both believe that grace is given to us in Word and in Sacrament. But when it comes to seeking unity with the larger church, we simply must be willing to put Luther aside and argue our case strictly from the scriptures.

And don't think that Lutherans are alone in this problem. Each church seems to follow someone whether it be a contemporary of Luther like Calvin, or a modern day leader like Rick Warren of the Purpose Driven Life, Bill Hybels of mega church Willow Creek, or Bruce Wilkerson of Prayer of Jabez fame. And, therefore, each of us in striving toward unity must put aside our heroes and gather together around the Word of God recorded in the Scripture that reveals to us the Word Incarnate Jesus.

I know that in preaching this sermon I am likely to offend someone and many will not like what I have to say. For, we have become very comfortable in this day and age with having our family and friends in other churches and thinking that there is no problem or issue with that. But it is exactly this comfort level that compelled me this week to preach on this text. We must understand that true unity in the church cannot be assumed, it must be accomplished in open dialogue around the Word of God.

We often watch TV and wonder how is it possible that some churches now openly ordain gay pastors? Perhaps, it is because for too long we have handled many of the truths of scripture as if they are of no real importance. We have acted like as long as a church calls themselves Christians and speaks the name of Christ, it is okay to them to believe as they wish about most anything else.

If you are a Lutheran, it should not be because you like our church building the best or because it is the church that you live closest to or were born into. It should be because you are convicted that what we believe is

what the Scripture teaches. It should be because you believe that what we believe is the truth of God. And if that is true, teachings in other churches that contradict the teachings of Scripture should truly concern you and if your loved ones are buying into these errors, that should be reason enough for action.

It is not that we as Lutherans believe that there are no other Christians in other churches, but it is to say that we believe that other denominations are in error on several important doctrines that the Scripture teach. We believe this because the Word of God constrains us to believe so.

One of my seminary professors described how Lutherans view other denominations beautifully using the human body as an illustration. He said that as long as a church body or any individual confesses that they are saved by grace alone through faith on account of the suffering and death of Jesus, in terms of their spiritual health, we must agree that their heart is still beating, they are still Christians. But if they err on other doctrines the bible clearly teaches, we must view them as having broken limbs or injured organs. And just like we would not ignore such injury in a physical body, we would be remiss to just ignore such injury in the spiritual body of Christ as well.

This sermon is not about glorifying Lutheranism for the sake of Lutheranism. Rather it is about how we truly work towards unity in the Christian Church as Paul exhorts in our text today. In order to do this honestly, we must first admit that we are not in agreement with other church bodies, and that this is not okay. For God has called all of us to speak the same things. And secondly, we must be willing to put aside our theological heroes in order that we might all gather around the Word and therein, find truth.

We no longer can cry unity, unity where there is none. Rather, we must admit our disunity with other churches in the hopes that honest dialogue might proceed for this recognition. We must hope and believe that as we talk and study together with them we might one day again all speak the same things just as God intends. For then and only then will there will be unity. May God grant this for Christ's sake. Amen.