

SERMON FOR JANUARY 22, 2023

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 1: 10

THEME: UNITED IN CHRIST

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

In the name of Jesus:

Many families have a game night, where the family gathers around the kitchen table and plays a game, typically a board or card game. For the older generation, memories go back to the time when the family played Uno, Clue, and Password. Recent board games that families might play could be Apples to Apples, or Blank Slate. One game that I don't like to play at all is not even a board game, it is the game called Jenga. We have it in our toy closet, but it has been a while since we have played it, probably because Luann and I don't like it.

Jenga is a game of building blocks, a tower is constructed and the object of the game is to not only remove the blocks from the tower but also to stack them up on the original tower of blocks. The reason Luann and I don't like it is that it is nerve wracking. I learned early on that each block serves its purpose and each piece is important, so important that if not placed and utilized properly in the whole scheme of things, the tower which you have

built comes tumbling down and you lose. For when it is your turn and if the tower collapses because of your wrong move, you are the loser.

The Apostle Paul wrote two letters to the church at Corinth. Why two letters? Because the church at Corinth had major issues. There were issues over communion practices, the importance and use of spiritual gifts, marital issues, and disagreements over whether Jesus actually rose from the grave. And that is all in the first letter! The second letter deals with a whole different set of issues! Whereas churches who got letters from Paul, such as the Epistle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Phillipians, only received one letter, the Corinthians were such a dysfunctional bunch that they received two letters, and some Biblical scholars think that Paul probably could have written a third letter!

So Paul starts out this first letter by stating as we saw last week that the Christians there were enriched in every way in Christ. And today Paul goes on to say that in spite of their divisions, they are UNITED IN CHRIST.

The divisions that were evident in Corinth were many, chiefly, though was the division over who was most important and who had the better Christian pedigree. Chloe was a member of that congregation and told Paul firsthand what she witnessed, that members were arguing over who was better. Paul sums up the disagreement by saying:<sup>1</sup> For it has been reported to

me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. **12**

What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" One group of Christians were claiming superiority over another because they followed Paul's teachings, others followed Apollos, and still others the Apostle Peter. Divisions arose as each group separated themselves from the other, arguing who was the better Christian or the more superior group.

It still happens today, doesn't it? We certainly see it in our society, one group of people claiming superiority because of a whole set of factors, race, religion, sexual identity are just some of the characteristics to name just a few. And we live in a time where individuality is championed and promoted. People today like to look out for and promote their individual rights. Demographics and the identification of different groups, along with the individuals in the groups, have become paramount in our society. Just look at all of the questions you are asked to answer when filling out a survey, the conductors of the survey want to know your age, your income, your sex, your gender, your address, your email address, and your social security number all in an effort to compartmentalize and try to understand you better as an individual. Now, in our society all of these things become important in

identification and in marketing, but in the Church there is a remarkable unity. None of this stuff matters.

The reason is twofold, one is as human beings we are all in the same boat. Paul writes about this fact by saying that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Elsewhere he says that sin pays off with death. The two common denominators that affect each and every human being is that we are all sinners and we all will die as a result of our sinfulness. None of the personal identification factors or attributes matter. The bottom line is you and I and everyone else is going to die because we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So in that sense, we are all united, all the same, death will be our end in this earthly life. But Paul brings us good news, great news, all on account of Christ! For we are all, as Christians, united under the name of Christ.

This is why Paul makes his appeal that divisions cease in the church because we have been united with Christ in the waters of Baptism. In Baptism none of the marks of identification that our society uses matter or make a difference. It doesn't matter your age, your address, your hair color, your social security number, your income or your retirement portfolio. You come to the font of Baptism with the identity of a lost and condemned sinner, and as an enemy of God. But in your Baptism God gives you a new identity. The sign of

the cross is placed upon your forehead and heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified. You are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Your sins are washed away. Your sinful life is forgiven and exchanged for Christ's righteousness. At that moment your citizenship is transferred from hell to heaven. You are remade into the child of Christ and are united with Him and with others in the faith.

You all are united in Christ. Look around, you may see someone who looks different than you but those differences do not matter to the Lord. The Church is made up of all sorts of different people. Babies, toddlers, young children, teenagers, young adults, middle aged and older adults. We worship together, not separately, but in unity, together confessing our sins to the Lord who is faithful and just and who forgives us all of our sins. Not because of our personality, not because of our income, not because of our sex or gender, rather each and everyone of us is forgiven by the grace of God given to us in Jesus Christ.

Grace. What a wonderful word. None of us deserve what we freely receive from God. But each of us receive it, all because of a merciful God who loves us and sent Jesus to be our Savior.

What a great blessing to know that God doesn't divide us, but unites us to Him in His Son Jesus Christ. All so that we can, with one voice, give glory to

Him who loves us and who blesses us in every way. Being united in Christ means that we are united with Him in Baptism, so that with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name.

Amen