

## 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 (NRSVue)

<sup>10</sup>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 knit together in the same mind and the same purpose. <sup>11</sup>For it has been made clear to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup>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." <sup>13</sup>Has Christ been 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>so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. <sup>17</sup>For 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.

<sup>18</sup>For 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.

### *Leadership 101*

If any pastor tells you, "There's one simple trick that you need to know for our Scripture to make sense," or "This sermon is going to answer every question that you have, teach you all you need to know" ... you probably shouldn't believe them. I'm not saying that we can't learn from sermons (if I was, I'd be out of a job), but it's rarely that simple. Sermons absolutely can teach, and I pray that they do each week. But they aren't going to answer all of your questions. They aren't going to act as a one-size-fits-all balm for whatever you'd need to know about, especially on such broad topics as church leadership and discipleship. You know what I'm saying? If ever you see a sermon titled, say, I don't know, "Leadership 101," that might be a misleading sermon title. I don't want to spoil anything, but... let's just take a look at what's coming next.

*Would you please pray with me? ...*

If there's one thing that we can learn from all of this, from Paul's words to the church in Corinth, and from our own experiences, it's that running a church is not easy. There are plenty of ways that people can disagree, and they do that in lots of different ways. If you listened to the sermon last week, this might sound familiar. Leading a church, even being a part of one, is complicated. Paul affirms this in this morning's scripture reading: there are quarrels among you. It would seem that time and again, century after century, powers and principalities have wooed us, worming their way into our collective consciousness. They've worked division and competition among us. There are quarrels among you, Paul writes.

If you listened to last week's sermon, you may recall that I spoke a bit about the divisions that were going on in the church in Corinth at the time of Paul's writing to them. They were

concerned with several things, the chief one that Paul mentions being a division in the church over who they were, who they wanted to be, and who led them. Was it Paul? Was it Apollos, a charismatic follower of Paul's? Was it Cephas, or Peter? Was it Christ?

Paul urges the Corinthians, rather than get caught up in these divisions, to instead be unified. Be in agreement, with no divisions among you, united in the same mind and the same purpose, Paul writes to the Corinthians. What advice! "I've heard that you guys are fighting. Have you tried not?" Wow thanks, Paul, I'm cured. Experience tells us that this is impossible. Was Paul that naive? Was he shaming the Corinthians, is he shaming us, for our inability to be united?

It's easy for us to assume so, or to read his admonition against divisions as judgmental. But I would suggest instead that he wasn't. Instead, I read his words this morning as a proclamation. Instead of being caught up in divisions about who we stand for, or who our "head guy" is, Paul writes, we need to be united for a different purpose. We need to understand that Jesus Christ is absolutely sufficient for ourselves and each other. Paul writes later in this letter that he has no problem with any teacher of the faith. But, Paul does have a problem with the divisiveness that comes when our allegiance is to the teacher, to the preacher, to the *leader*, and not to Christ alone.

Instead, it is the cross that Paul urges unification in and under. It is the people of the church, and their belief and trust in the saving life of Jesus Christ, that empowers them to lead the church together. It's the gifts, the life experience, every aspect of each person's identity in the church—and its leadership—that gives the most complete witness to that body of Christ. To quote a former pastor, we have a cruciform faith. It goes up—between the individual and the divine—and it goes out—to all around us. Our faith in the cross means that we must be cross-minded in everything that we do: trusting in God, and working together, to ensure that we can do things well. That's true in every occasion, but I might say that it's especially true when we talk about the church.

Friends, this morning, we have chosen, nominated, and elected leaders in the church, as we do each year. We've ordained two new deacons to care for the congregation, and a new ruling elder to take an active role of governance on session, along with reinstalling another, and we are so very grateful for their willingness to answer this call. But the truth is that, although we have chosen some new folks for these roles, and although we've set aside some people to head the charge of stewarding our church, the burden falls to each of us, too. This is not the session's church. This is not the deacons' church. This is *certainly* not *my* church. But this is your church. This is our church. Together, when we are united, we decide where it goes.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in the midst of divisions. There will always be divisions, I think even Paul would agree. I think we all know that to be true. We cannot always agree on everything. But, we can trust that we are better together. We can trust that, although there may be a difference in the kind of gifts that each of us have, when we're together, we lack nothing. And so, to our new church officers, I think that we are all excited about their abilities to care for the church and its ministry, mission, property, people, finances, and everything else that

encompasses what the church is and does. But while they may be the ones “in charge,” it’s all of us, in the room, on Zoom, and in all aspects of the church’s life and witness to Christ, that determine how we do life together, as Christ’s body. In truth, Christ is the head of the church. We look to God, and to each other, for guidance. And while there may still be disagreement at times, we can remain united in that disagreement under the cross that is a model for our faith and our leadership: outwards, and upwards, to God’s kingdom come. Amen.