

Occasion: Second Sunday after Epiphany [C]

Date: 01-17-2010

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Title: Without the One, None!

Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹²What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas [Peter]"; still another, "I follow Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

– 1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Introduction:

An old Arab died and left seventeen camels to his three sons. The Will specified that the eldest son was to have one half of them; the middle son, one third; and the youngest son one ninth. The sons were puzzled. Seventeen cannot be divided evenly by two, or three or nine. How were they going to divide up the camels according to their father's Will. Finally, a neighbor came to their aid. "I will lend you my camel," he said. Now there were 18 camels. The eldest son took half, which was 9. The middle son took one-third, which was 6. The youngest son took one-ninth, which was 2. Thus, $9 + 6 + 2 = 17$. The neighbor then took his camel back, and they were all happy. [Concordia Pulpit Resources. Vol 5, Pt 1, page 12]

Setting:

Some things that seem impossible on their own become very possible, very easily worked out with the addition of One to their number. Mankind, on its own, is unable to work out how to live in the world in peace and harmony. Nations cannot get along, different special interest groups compete against each other, trying to gain the advantage over the other groups, even individuals find it difficult, if not impossible, to work together in harmony and live at peace with each other. In this world ruined by sin, where it is all about "Me" and "My Rights" and "My Satisfaction", "My Gratification", we never seem to find the solution to our problems, our conflicts, where everyone is happy. We can never figure out how to divide up the 17 camels, where everyone gets what is theirs and everyone ends up happy. It always seems that someone has to win and someone has to lose. How can we work everything out so that all people win and no one loses? Like the 17 camels that were to be divided up among the 3 brothers, what seems impossible for everyone in the world becomes easily worked out with the addition of One—with the addition of the One God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

I. MANY CAUSES OF DIVISION:

The Corinthian congregation was a church deeply divided over many issues. When the apostle Paul began his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, he addressed a problem over which many in the congregation were divided.

¹⁰I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹My brothers, some from

Some of the members claimed to be disciples of Paul, others of Peter, others of a Christian leader named Apollos, and still others of Christ Himself. By attaching themselves to a particular teacher, each group sought to claim a superior faith, a superior knowledge of Truth, a superior claim of authority over the others. The assumption was that the best teacher produces the best educated students. Or, the students who were educated by the most authoritative teacher should also exercise the most authority. Thus, instead of coming together and working together for one mission, one purpose, different groups sought to impose their agenda, their priorities.

As the apostle Paul continues writing, he seeks to draw everyone together, to bring unity out of division by directing everyone to the very foundation of the Christian Faith, one foundation upon which everyone is to build and everything in the Church is to be built. There are not many foundations upon which to build, only one. There are not many temples to be constructed, only one. Thus Paul writes:

³⁰It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, Who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

³¹Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

– 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

Every Christian enters the Church, the Body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit sent by God the Father. Every Christian stands before God as righteous because through faith he/she has been given the credit for the righteous life that Jesus lived and every Christian has been forgiven the debt of his/her sin because Jesus paid the debt for sin as He died under God's judgment on the cross. Therefore, as the work of Jesus as the Savior is the One and Only Foundation upon which the Christian Faith is established and as all who labor in the Church do so to build upon that One Foundation of Christ, there should be no divisions in the congregation, since everyone stands upon the same foundation of faith in Christ and everyone is working to the same end, to lead the unbelieving to faith and to nurture the believers to grow in knowledge and service to the Lord.

In the words of the Epistle Lesson in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, the apostle Paul addresses another cause of division in the congregation—spiritual gifts. By virtue of creation, God has made every person as a unique individual. Every person has a unique physical appearance, and a unique combination of mental and physical abilities. So also in the new creation. As the Holy Spirit works in the life of each

Christian, He gifts them with a unique set of spiritual gifts to be used in service to build up the believers in the congregation. Thus, Paul writes:

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. – *1 Corinthians 12:4-7*

The important truth that the apostle Paul emphasizes is that it is the same God Who is at work in each Christian, directing them in the different works of service conducted in the Body of Christ, using the different spiritual gifts that are imparted by the Holy Spirit. One God at work building up the One Body of Christ through the work of the One Spirit. Yet, to do this, there are different ministries, different areas of service in those ministries and different gifts given to individuals to carry out those ministries. The apostle Paul expressed the same Truth with these words to the Christians in Ephesus:

³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. – *Ephesians 4:3-6*

For the Church to be most effective in the Mission that Jesus has entrusted to His followers, everyone in the Church must be focused on building on the One Foundation of Jesus in their own personal faith lives and together with every other Christian as a Church.

II. FOCUSING ON THE ONE FOUNDATION, THE ONE MISSION:

The Corinthian Christians found themselves tangled up in dissension because they lost focus on the One Foundation – Jesus, and the One Mission – to build upon the One Foundation of Jesus as the Savior. The apostle Paul sought to re-establish a healthy and wholesome unity among them with simple statements of what they all knew to be true, but had lost sight of in their everyday lives.

What was a problem for the first century Church, is also a challenge for God's people today in the twenty-first century. How easily in our lives we get distracted from what is most important. How easily we focus on individual areas of ministry in the Church, and forget how they all work together to accomplish the "Big Picture", the One Mission to grow in the Body of Christ. And also, how easy for the unbelieving world to misunderstand the real purpose and mission of the Church amidst all the chaos of the problems in the world. The Church is not just another special interest group that is lobbying Congress on certain moral issues. The Church is not a "right-wing" or a "left-wing" organization with a social or political

agenda. Yet, at times, that is how the Church may be portrayed in the media and looked upon by the world.

You may remember hearing last year about a study that was done here at St. Paul's using a book called "Essential Church". The study was open to any who wanted to participate and we had two different groups go through the book. The basic point of the book was that people are committed and involved in the worship life and ministry of the church when they see they see the church as *Essential* in their lives. The church, the congregation has a ministry that is helping them to learn the teachings of the Scriptures, to grow in faith and is training them and giving them opportunities to serve the Lord and others. Everyone is focused on the One Mission of building their lives and the congregation upon the One Foundation of Christ.

Both of the groups that participated in the "Essential Church" study believed that St. Paul's should have a clear and concisely written Mission Statement as the way of focusing all the members of the congregation on the One Mission of building their lives upon the One Foundation of Christ. So, in two weeks, on Sunday, January 31st at 6:00 p.m., everyone is invited to come together for the purpose of writing this Mission Statement to express what should be the common goal for our existence as a congregation. This first meeting will provide the background information necessary for writing the Mission Statement for St. Paul's. I anticipate that we will need 3 to 4 meetings to arrive at the final Mission Statement. Once this is completed, it will be presented at a Voters' Assembly meeting for approval as the Mission Statement for St. Paul's. To help us prepare for this meeting I am asking that you complete the small form that was sent to you in the January Newsletter or that you can find on St. Paul's website. On the home page there is a brief article on the Mission Statement meeting with a link to more information and the form indicating your desire to participate. Even if you did not participate in the "Essential Church" study, you can easily participate in the development and writing of the Mission Statement. If while it is on your mind, you want to tell me today that you want to participate, just write your name on a small piece of paper with the word "Mission Statement" and I'll know you are interested.

Conclusion:

What seemed impossible to the three brothers trying to divide the 17 camels among themselves according to their father's Will became easy with the addition of one camel. What seems impossible or at least difficult for us as God's children to accomplish can be done with the addition and reliance upon the One—the Holy Spirit added to us to do the work Jesus has entrusted to us. We have One Foundation, that laid by Jesus Christ in His holy life and His sacrificial death. We have One Mission— to build our lives and His Church upon that foundation. As we focus our faith, our lives and our energy upon that One Mission, as individuals and as a congregation, we can carry out God the Father's Will for our lives. AMEN