

FIRST LESSON: Psalm 133: 1-3  
SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
January 26, 2020

## **“Arguing”**

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

People have arguments . . . sometimes really stupid arguments. Two different congregations reported that they had fights over the type of coffee served during coffee hour. In one of the churches, they moved from Folgers to a stronger Starbucks brand. In the other church, they just moved to a stronger blend. Whatever the difference may be, members of the second church left the congregation over it. It’s been suggested that their new name might be *The Right Blend Fellowship*. In another church members left because one church member hid the vacuum cleaner from them. This resulted in a major fight and split. Possible names for the new congregation include *The Second Electrolux Church*, *The New Hoover Fellowship* and *The No Compromise Dyson Church* and the *Shark Worship Center*, but I don’t think that one sounds very safe.

Last week we did our welcome to Corinth introduction, and if weather, family obligations or sickness did not keep you away you will remember that one of the things about the culture of Corinth is that they were an argumentative bunch. It was a very diverse culture, a mixture of languages, ethnic backgrounds and religions. Unfortunately, as we in this country know, this does not always lead to harmony. People were used to taking sides and breaking into political factions. Human nature being what it is they identified with different leaders. Paul had gotten word that the Corinthian church was struggling with this problem “through Chloe’s people.” Chloe was probably a businesswoman from Ephesus who had agents that traveled back and forth to Corinth, a distance of about 225 miles. She may have originally been from Corinth. We don’t know anything more about her, but she was a trustworthy source of information in Paul’s estimation. According to Chloe’s people in the church in Corinth there were those who said they followed Paul, those who said they followed Apollos, those who said they followed Cephas, and a final group that claimed to follow Christ. Saying “we follow Christ” might be the right position theologically, but evidently the people who said it were just trying to one-up the others.

So, who were these leaders? Paul we know. Apollos was a very eloquent Alexandrian Christian who visited Corinth after Paul. He was especially gifted in public debate, a skill highly valued at the time. Although this may not have been his intent, he became something of a celebrity in Christian circles because of his talent for public speaking. We still do this. Billy Graham, after

all, gained a worldwide reputation. So, if Paul was the founder and Apollos was Billy Graham, who was Cephas?

Cephas was Peter. We don't have any record that Peter even went to Corinth! And they used his Aramaic name, Cephas, rather than his Greek name. But it may be that the Jewish-Christian believers felt a stronger connection with Peter than the others. He was one of the original twelve. He actually walked with Jesus and was with him through everything that happened. Paul and Apollos did not come to faith until after the resurrection.

Paul was not seduced by the idea of having his own followers in Corinth. Instead he appealed to them to find unity **“through the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.”** This wasn't a casual statement. To speak in someone's name was to directly represent them. Paul was invoking the authority of Christ. And what he asked them to do at first glance seems not only impossible, but quite possibly not even desirable. He asked them to be in complete agreement with one another! He asked them to—

Say the same things.

Share the same mind.

Come to the same decisions or conclusions.

The NIV is a little more elegant in its translation of the Greek. It paraphrases, saying “all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

So let's break it down: “Say the same thing” is a literal translation of the Greek. It refers to ongoing speech, but it also means to move to a conclusion. It means in the end of the day to speak in agreement on the essentials. We might want to paint the walls a different color. We might like strong or weak coffee. We might even disagree politically, but at the end of the day we agree about Christ and our message is clear. When Christians have serious disagreements, and we do, we are called to come together to try to resolve these issues. Sometimes we will have to agree to disagree, but about Jesus we should all be on the same page.

In order to speak the same message Paul says we must share the same mind. The mind is the reasoning capacity that we all have. It is our understanding of the world and ourselves in it. It is with our mind that we learn about God and learn from God. But being united in our mind or our thoughts is darn near impossible. Even married couples have trouble with this one. We might be able to finish one another's sentences but that doesn't mean we have the same thoughts. **But in some things we can be united in our thoughts.** We can experience unity when we share the same values. If love, truth, mercy, justice and compassion are a priority for us and they are a priority for our sisters and brothers in faith, we will find ourselves becoming more and more unified. We may disagree on the best way to accomplish something, but we will agree on our end goals.

Finally, Paul urges the Corinthians to have the same judgment, what the NIV paraphrases into, “perfectly united in mind and thought.” The word is **gnómé** and it means purpose or opinion, judgment or decision. It's what we do

with our thoughts. We share the same experience and we come to a shared decision. If we're all following different leaders we'll be pulling against each other rather than pulling together.

The Corinthian congregation was clearly argumentative. We know that they even had lawsuits against one another! But what do we get out of arguments? What is the attraction? People rarely feel good after an argument. Usually it leaves us feeling down. It's hard to concentrate and we lose interest in things that make us happy. Conflict floods our bodies with fight or flight hormones that then leave us exhausted, anxious and miserable. The problem is our survival instinct. We are biologically set up to respond in three instinctual ways to perceived threats. We fight. We run, or we play dead. Playing dead for us means we just freeze and say and do nothing. And because we are dealing with a threat response which is at the level of instinct not reason, when we fight we fight to the death. We want to win no matter what. Which results in ridiculous situations like people hiding the vacuum cleaner from each other.

Paul is reminding us in his own way that we are more than our animal instincts. We are called to live at the higher level of thought, reason and shared ideals. The Corinthians identified with various leaders out of survival instinct. They allied themselves with the one they thought the strongest. But the battle was never necessary in the first place, because they were all on the same team.

Sometimes conflict within the church arrives not from within but from the outside world of politics, because human beings occupy many spheres of existence. During the Civil War denominations split over the issue of slavery. The northern and southern Presbyterian church did not come back together until 1983! Now we have arrived at another point in our history when division and mistrust threatens to rip us apart. Brothers and sisters in the faith accuse one another of being racist, communist, unjust, anti-American and even—not Christian at all. And the new litmus test is who we vote for.

As bad as it has been, as bad as it might get this next year, all of us must be clear on one thing. Our allegiance does not belong to Trump or Walsh or Weld on the Republican side or Biden or Sanders or Klobuchar or Buttigieg, or Bloomberg or Steyer or anyone else on the Democrat side. Yes, we should vote. Yes, we should be responsible members of our society and advocate for justice, truth and mercy. **But we serve Jesus Christ.** And we belong to Jesus Christ. And we must hold hands and pull together as one if we are to emerge on the other side of this and help to bring healing to our land.

Paul was clear. No human being has the power to save us. Only God. No human leader knows all things. Only God. No human is always right. Only God. It is always a mistake to put a person on a pedestal and follow them unquestioningly. But Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Let us not fall to the level of instinct, but rise to the level of the Spirit. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together in unity!  
<sup>2</sup> It is like precious oil poured on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron's beard,  
down on the collar of his robe.  
<sup>3</sup> It is as if the dew of Hermon  
were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,  
even life forevermore.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup> My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."  
<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.