

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

(1 Corinthians 1:10-18)

Intro: Our Dream Team had its third retreat last weekend.
-Friday evening.
-All day Saturday.

Our Dream Team is the group that is leading the congregational renewal process.
-We're calling:
 #Rekindle the Fire.
-Those people are:
 #H.I. Aston.
 #Avis Erickson.
 #Mary Peterson.
 #Myself.
-With Barbara Sappenfield joining us.
 #From Bethany.

One of the exercises we were asked to do last weekend.
-Recall what it was like around the family dinner table.
 #When we were 10-12 years old.
 #Share that experience with the rest of our Dream Team.
-Now I must tell you.
 #Not everyone on our team thought this was a valuable exercise.
 *Some:
 +Didn't see the usefulness of it.
 +Thought it was a waste of time.
-Now I must also tell you.
 #What we receive at these retreats.
 *Not:
 +Step-by-step.
 +Fool-proof.
 +Do-it-yourself.
 =Model for congregational renewal.
 *But rather a series of:
 +Tools.
 +Resources.
 =From which we can pick and choose.
 -What's useful.
 #What's not.
 -What's helpful.
 #What's not.

- We may never use that exercise as a part of our process.
- But what that exercise reinforced for me is the fact:
 - #We all had different experiences around the dinner table.
 - *For some.
 - +Positive.
 - +Enjoyable.
 - *For some.
 - +Unpleasant.
 - +Downright painful
 - #But everyone got fed.

That can be a helpful lesson for us.

- In the church.
- In this congregation.
 - #We're not all the same.
 - #We don't all have the same:
 - *Backgrounds.
 - *Experiences.
 - *Perspectives.
 - *Interests.
 - *Talents.
 - *Passions.
 - *Causes.
 - #But we all get fed.
 - *By the one Lord.
 - +At the Lord's table.
 - +With the Lord's Word.
 - *There is unity in our diversity.

I. St. Paul Encouraged The Church In Corinth To Find Unity In Their Diversity.

A. Their Diversity Created Divisions.

1. There were a number of issues that divided them.
 - a. St. Paul will begin to address those later in his epistle.
 - Marriage between:
 - #Christians.
 - #Non-Christians.
 - *Was that acceptable?
 - *Was that grounds for divorce?
 - Food sacrificed to idols.
 - #Was it okay to buy it and eat it?
 - *When some of it was sold in the market place.
 - #Or not?

- Role of women in worship.
 - #What behavior was acceptable?
 - *What was not?
 - #What attire was acceptable?
 - *What was not?
- Gifts from the Holy Spirit.
 - #Were some gifts better than others?
- b. Here in 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18 the issue is about:
 - Pastoral leadership.
 - Congregational identity.
 - #As we have seen from our study of Acts.
 - *Paul's mode of operation:
 - +Move to a new town.
 - +Teach of preach:
 - =First in the synagogues.
 - =Then also in other places around town.
 - +As pastoral leadership emerged.
 - =From among the new converts.
 - +Paul would turn over pastoral leadership.
 - =Move on to a new town.
 - #Corinth was a little different.
 - *Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months.
 - +Acts 18: 11.
 - *Apollos wasn't a native of Corinth.
 - +He was an Alexandrian Jew.
 - =Acts 18: 24-28.
 - +Given instruction in the Christian Faith.
 - =In Ephesus.
 - =By Aquila and Priscilla.
 - Who had spent time in Corinth.
 - #After being expelled from Rome.
 - *By the Emperor Claudius.
 - =Acts 18: 1-2.
 - *Apollos visited Corinth.
 - +Acts 18: 27-28.
 - +After Paul had left.
 - =Paul had paved the way for Apollos in Corinth.
 - 1 Corinthians 3: 6.
 - =As Apollos had paved the way for Paul in Ephesus.
 - Acts 18: 24-19: 10.

2. People of Corinth got hung up on their pastoral leaders.
 - a. Those whose witness had brought them to faith in Jesus.
 - b. Those who had baptized them.
 - Some identified themselves with:
 - #Paul.
 - #Apollos.
 - #Cephas (Peter), for some reason.
 - #We have no Biblical record.
 - *Of Peter ever having been in Corinth.
 3. Then there were Chloe's people.
 - a. We don't know:
 - Who Chloe was.
 - Who Chloe's people were.
 - #Slaves?
 - #Household servants?
 - b. Were they part of the problem?
 - Insiders?
 - #Tattletales.
 - #Members of one faction or another.
 - *Triangulating with Paul.
 - *Hoping that he would choose sides (their side).
 - Outsiders?
 - #Muckrakers.
 - #Trying to stir up even more dissension.
 - *To make the church in Corinth look bad.
 4. But the problem in Corinth.
 - a. More than bad appearances.
 - b. They were:
 - Missing.
 - Undermining.
 - #Essence of the Christian faith.
- B. The Centrality Of The Gospel Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ.
1. That is the great divider.
 - a. To outsiders.
 - Those who are perishing.
 - #Foolishness.
 - *Crucified Messiah?
 - *Crucified savior?
 - +What nonsense!
 - b. To insiders.
 - Those who are being saved.
 - #Power of God.

2. Cross of Christ has power.
 - a. To bring life out of death.
 - b. To forgive sin.
 - c. To unite the believers of diverse backgrounds.
 - In Corinth, Greece.
 - In Tulsa, Oklahoma.

II. It Is The Cross Of Christ That Unites Us In Our Diversity.

A. We're Not All Alike.

1. Not even close.
 - a. We don't all look alike.
 - Although we are fairly homogeneous racially.
 - #Perhaps too homogeneous.
 - But it's not our physical appearance that unites us.
 - b. We don't all like the same kind of religious music.
 - Which is the main reason we have two worship services.
 - #Contemporary.
 - #Traditional.
 - It's certainly not because we don't have enough space.
 - #In the pews.
 - #In the parking lot.
 - But it's not our musical preferences that unite us.
 - c. We don't all have the same perspective on social issues.
 - When the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.
 - #Voted in 2009.
 - *To allow gay and lesbian pastors in committed relationships.
 - +To serve as pastors in our church body.
 - There were some who wondered:
 - #If our congregation should leave the ELCA.
 - #If I would lead the exodus.
 - My response.
 - #Then.
 - #Now.
 - *It's not our views on human sexuality that unite us.
 - *Our views on human sexuality ought not to divide us.
 - It's not the social issues that unite us.
 - d. We don't all read the Bible the same way.
 - As strange as that might sound.
 - But it's not how we read the Bible that unites us.

2. We are in the process of Rekindling the Fire.
 - a. Our process of congregational renewal.
 - b. H.I. Aston.
 - Chair of our Dream Team.
 - Has been like a thoroughbred race horse.
 - #Chomping at the bit.
 - #Eager to:
 - *Break from the gate.
 - *Set goals.
 - *Adopt programs.
 - c. I've been more like a jockey.
 - Pulling back on the reins.
 - #Not because I'm opposed to:
 - *Goals.
 - *Programs.
 - #But because I want to give the process a chance to work.
 - After we have solicited input from the entire congregation.
 - #Then we can begin to focus on:
 - *Goals.
 - *Programs.
 - *Or whatever the final product might be.
 - d. Right now.
 - We are planning another set of small group gatherings.
 - #For February.
 - We'll probably need another set of small group gatherings after that.
 - #To give everyone a chance to provide input.
 - e. What we will do with that input I honestly don't know.
 - We haven't even begun to talk about how we will:
 - #Sift.
 - #Winnow.
 - *What we receive from:
 - +All y'all within Ascension
 - +Our community outside our doors.
 - =Component we haven't even begun to address.
 - f. When we do all of that.
 - What will the final product look like?
 - Will it be something that everyone needs to agree on?
 - #Maybe yes.
 - #Maybe no.
 - *There may be some things.
 - +I don't know what those things might be.
 - +Where we may need a pretty broad consensus.
 - =Especially if it's going to cost money.

- *There may be other things.
 - +I don't know what those things might be.
 - +Where a handful of people.
 - =Committed to trying something:
 - New.
 - #Different.
 - Old.
 - #Done in a different way.
 - +Will we be able to figure out a way to bless that?
- g. When I think about the ministries we already have:
 - Helping Hands Food Pantry.
 - #Ministry of the entire congregation.
 - #Happens because a handful of people have a passion.
 - *To make it happen.
 - Praise Band.
 - #Ministry for the benefit of the entire congregation.
 - #Happens because a handful (or two) of people have a passion.
 - *To make it happen.
 - Our congregational outreach through the ELCA.
 - #Water wells.
 - #Chapels.
 - #Medical mission trips.
 - *To our companion synod in Tanzania.
 - #World Hunger.
 - *HIV prevention.
 - *Malaria prevention.
 - *Lutheran Disaster Response.
 - #Happen because a handful of people have a passion.
 - *To make them happen.
- h. As we Rekindle the Fire.
 - Can we be?
 - Will we be?
 - #Open.
 - #Supportive.
 - *If a handful of people have a passion for something:
 - +New.
 - +Different.
 - *If we have new and different people.
 - +Who have a passion for something:
 - =New.
 - =Different.
 - +Who have a passion for something old.
 - =Can we truly welcome newcomers?
 - Even if it means giving up control.

- i. I speak of these things now.
 - Not to:
 - #Pre-judge.
 - #Short-circuit.
 - *Process before us.
 - But to remind ourselves.
 - #These things are not ultimately what unite us.
 - #Pray God, the Holy Spirit will not allow them to divide us.

B. We Are United By The Cross Of Christ.

- 1. Cross that was big enough for all the folks in Corinth.
 - a. Those who had a loyalty to:
 - Paul.
 - Apollos.
 - Cephas.
 - b. Cross of Christ was the power of God to salvation.
- 2. Cross is big enough for all of us.
 - a. Cross that casts its shadow:
 - Over the Scriptures that we read.
 - Over the font where we are baptized.
 - Over the table where we are fed.
 - b. Cross that casts its shadow.
 - Over infants.
 - Over toddlers.
 - Over youth.
 - Over adults.
 - Over senior citizens.
 - c. Cross that casts its shadow.
 - Over:
 - #Gays.
 - #Straights.
 - Over those who are:
 - #Single.
 - #Married.
 - #Divorced.
 - #Widowed.
 - d. Cross that casts its shadow:
 - Over those who are well.
 - Over those who are sick.
 - Over those who walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
 - e. Cross that casts its shadow:
 - Over those of us who are here most every Sunday.
 - Over those we see only once in awhile.
 - Over those whose hearts the Holy Spirit has not yet opened.

Concl: Cross of Christ is the power of God to salvation.
-That is what unites us.
#In our diversity.