

1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
January 26, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

I have been watching quite a bit of basketball lately. Both in person, going to Bear basketball games, but also on the television watching the Hawks, Cyclones, and Panthers. I guess you could say we are basketball junkies in our household. It's always fun to see a team grow and often mesh over the course of a season. Each player learning his or her role and how that role contributes to the overall purpose of the team. Each player valued and vital to the team's success. Each player willing to set aside personal agendas and recognition. When a team truly understands these things is generally when a team moves from an average team to a good team or a good team to a great team.

After last night's Bears varsity boys road victory, one of the assistant coaches (and a teacher at the middle school), Luke Posivio, tweeted: "A constant rebuttal to a 'who's better?' argument is always, 'Well how many points do you average?' IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT SCORING. Role players, defenders, practice scout team, they all have a purpose on the team. And once a kid realizes that, they become a GREAT player."

I wouldn't consider myself that good of a basketball player growing up. I was nearly always the shortest kid on the floor. I wasn't a great shooter. At times, it was easy to get down on myself. But I do recall a coach telling me, "Whaley, we don't need you to score. We just need you to handle and take care of the basketball, find the open guy to pass it to, and give everything you have." While those words didn't magically change my physical talent, they did help give focus to my role and value on the team.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, is somewhat like a coach. At times, he is providing instruction. Other times, he is the positive voice that keeps encouraging and building them up. At times, he must bring attention to and put a halt to things (i.e., practices which are often creating factions within the church

and pitting one group against the other) which are disrupting the gathered assembly in being the fullest expression of the body of Christ they can be in their community.

This seems to be what Paul is driving home this morning. He utters an appeal to the church he loves to keep their focus set squarely on their calling and “be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” In fact, he uses the word “same” 3 times in the span of the opening verse (10); although one is translated as “be in agreement”. Regardless, the point is made. Divisiveness is rearing its ugly head, quarrels have surfaced, and the cause seems to be a lack of identity and a failed understanding of the purpose at hand.

Paul will have none of it. It’s not that Paul is saying there must be agreement on every issue; because how would any of us grow if there weren’t another brother or sister to challenge us to see another side of the story or open us to a new understanding of a particular topic or simply tell us we were in the wrong. That’s not at all what Paul is saying; but, what he is pressing the church to understand is that they have been called to way of life that is dramatically different than the way of life they once lived and still permeates the world around them.

It’s a way of life that isn’t all unlike that which permeates our culture.

Individualism. Loyalties to one party, group, or leader that threaten one’s ability to see the bigger picture. Within the body of Christ, there can be none of it.

In what seems to be an almost comedic recap of those Paul baptized he makes the claim he can’t even recall whether he baptized anyone else than a few individuals. Either Paul has a very short memory span, or he is making a point it really doesn’t matter. Placing an emphasis on the absurdity of keeping personal statistics or a failed understanding by some of the purpose of Paul’s ministry and the purpose of Christ’s church on earth – the gospel of Jesus Christ and the cross of Jesus Christ. Things such as who baptized who are beside the point.

The cross, J.R. Daniel Kirk, reminds us, “transforms the value of our actions and status. Because of the cross we ... learn to view the world differently.” He goes on to further state:

Paul beckons his readers to participate in the story of the cross—a narrative in which all that we think we know about the world, its value, its knowledge, its wisdom, its virtue, is reconfigured by God’s great act of salvation in Christ. The message of the cross is not something that only applies to entering the people of God. It gives shape to the entirety of our life together.<sup>i</sup>

While differences in opinion will arise. Disagreements persist. Our purpose and our identity will not. We are people of the cross. We are people united to the body of Christ. When “silly” differences, allegiances and loyalties, personal agendas and biases take priority is when factions set in and divisions “make it difficult for the community actually to be a community. Worship, Christian formation, fellowship, works of kindness and mercy—all these and more are compromised, and even made possible, by division.” (Kirk)

Our purpose is to tell the story of Jesus Christ. Proclaim the gospel. Make known the transformative power of the cross in which power is found in weakness, life out of death, and a self-giving love the likes the world had never witnessed before. Quite literally, the text doesn’t state Paul was sent to “proclaim the gospel” but “to gospel.” Does this change then our understanding with regards to the church’s purpose?

I think it does, because we can gospel without simply verbally expressing it. To gospel also manifest itself through our shining forth the grace of Christ inherent in the gospel as we live it out. What does this look like one might ask? What are the actions of gosseling? Paul sums them up in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter writing:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. Love is not rude, it is not selfish, and it cannot be made angry easily. Love does not remember wrongs done against it. Love is never happy when others do wrong, but it is always happy with the truth. Love never gives up on people. It never stops trusting, never loses hope, and never quits. (vv.4-7)

Love. Self-giving. Unconditional. Empathetic to the other. Compassionate. Setting aside personal gain. The love of God revealed in Christ is the glue that holds us together. To bear forth this love to one another and to the world is our purpose. Each of you is important and has vital gifts in helping our community live into that calling. Each of you has a role to play. No one person is greater than the next. Each of us has equal value.

Finally, Mary Hinkle Shore in her commentary on our text from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians write:<sup>ii</sup>

A friend tells the story of a meeting at his church. The group included six people talking about multicultural diversity in their congregation. The small congregation in Miami includes Haitians, African Americans, Caucasians, and Latinos. At the meeting, as the conversation went on, one of those present became more and more agitated. Finally, Beverly banged her hand on the table and explained why the discussion angered her. “We are not a social experiment!” she announced. “We are a church.” What mattered, she said, was that they were all God’s children.

You are God’s child. We all are God’s children. Let us be of the same mind on that sure and certain promise! Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> J.R. Daniel Kirk, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), 2014.

<sup>ii</sup> Mary Hinkle Shore, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), 2017.