

As I was preparing for this sermon, a special anniversary passed for me. A year ago on January 13th, I no longer was a “half-pastor” as my students so nicely put it. After a lifetime of striving for this goal, I had achieved the status of reverend and I couldn’t be more thankful for the people and places that got me to this point.

I am thankful for teachers, professors, youth leaders, family and friends who helped teach me and mentor me. One person who kept coming up as I reflected on this lifelong goal to ministry was my grandmother. She was a woman of deep faith which she lived out each and every day. The idea of never knowing a stranger is one that would commonly be used to describe the type of person she was, but I feel like that wasn’t true, because my grandmother knew strangers and interacted with them every single day, but she never treated them as such. Every person from strangers at the grocery to me and my siblings felt the love of Christ emanating off my of her every time we were around her.

I am sure that each one of you can think of a face or name of a person who fits this role for you. Maybe that person like me is a family member or perhaps a teacher or perhaps this person was one of a different tradition or faith than your own.

When I read this text in 1 Corinthians, I wonder if these people that Paul name drops are such people. Was Apollos a person of eminence faith, living it out everywhere they went. Maybe Cephus, otherwise known as the disciple Peter, was someone who Christ's love emanated from so widely that every person that crossed his path was instantly wrapped up in it.

I mean I surely see the point that Paul is making that the division amongst the church in Corinth had reached a breaking point and these personal allegiances were going to lead to an eventual schism and potential conflict. I understand fully that he says these names in particular, because these people are being named as THE pillars of the faith rather than Christ, but still that doesn't mean I am not confused with this text.

I am confused with the text, because Paul says that the cure for these divisions is for all of us to be of one mind and one purpose and that we be united together by Christ. I mean the second seems clear enough to me that we are united together by Christ but the thing is then what about that first one because what does it even mean to be of 1 purpose and 1 mind?

What is the one purpose and one mind that the church should share together? I mean the clear answer to that question is we should share in the one purpose of Christ and his one mind. Well I will press you again, what does that even mean?

If I asked you to write down your answer on a piece of paper, I can imagine that every single one of you would have a different answer. Each answer reflecting your teachers, churches, and experiences. Each purpose, wholly unique to you in its own way.

I can imagine that many people in this room would counter my point, by saying the one purpose and one mind that we should all share is one of love. Christ's purpose for us as people of faith is to love God and to love others.

Well what does that look like? I bet that when I asked that as many thoughts people are in this room crossed through this space if not more, and you know I think that is the beauty of this group for I believe that it exactly as God designed it.

For just a moment I am going to take a jump to one of my favorite stories in scripture so, think with me back to the book of Genesis wherein the people are united together and decide that they want to build a tower up to God, and when God sees this, God scatters the people. I realize this is more meant to represent the existence of different languages and people groups, but couldn't God have just as easily knocked the tower down and made a large enough scene that the people deemed that it wasn't worth building the tower again like.... why scatter the people?

I feel as though God would have had the foresight to see the potential problems that would come from such divisions. For it seems like to me if God is all-knowing this is something that would just be all too clear. So, then why do that? Well, I personally believe and I believe it is supported in the words of scripture, that God knew our potential. God knew that we are stronger as a people scattered apart, unique and individual.

Maybe just maybe God knew we are stronger together as people who are different than we could be as one homogenous group. It is an idea that seems so entirely counterintuitive to what we have been taught our entire lives especially in the church, because every other day we hear about schism and disagreements breaking up churches and families, one recent time being the decision that the United Methodist Church decided to split over the issue of LGBTQ rights within

the church. Which is just one of many different examples of what I believe Paul was trying to prevent from happening. Paul was trying to do the work to keep the Corinthian church united rather than have these sects of people band together to create their own separate groups within the larger whole.

I am not going to speak further on the experience of our neighbors in the Methodist church, but their example and the example even of the Corinthian church does reveal a potential problem with my entire sermon and that is, when is it too much? Where are the normal boundaries that we as people of faith should keep in order to keep even this scattered group of people somewhat together.

Well the thing is I think that is something that isn't entirely clear much like, what truly splits us apart isn't entirely clear, because much like the question of the one purpose if I to ask each person in this room, what their non negotiable point is most would be different in some way. The thing is there are no simple answers when it comes to this work of being in community together.

There is no one size fits all answer that can apply to every single church in every situation, thus we have to figure out how to move forward. It is here that I want to turn to Paul's message to the church at Corinth one more time, right at the end he says this

“ For the message about the cross is foolishness...” And honestly, I love this phrase, this idea that the message of the cross is foolish, because according to the definition of foolish from Websters, it is something that lacks good sense which to me honestly sums up a lot of the idea of the ministry of Christ like think about it the guy went around doing stuff that was always making some official mad. Christ's ministry was one that was so entirely counter cultural to the point those on the outside could only deem it foolish and this is the type of posture we as a church must take in everything we do.

Rather than engage difference with fear, we must be willing to engage it with love.

Rather than seeing dialogue as conflict and a means to worry, we must be willing to see them as an opportunity to grow listening and debating together in humility.

And rather than instantly deciding that our differences make us incompatible we must be willing to be humble, emitting the places where we can grow while also doing the same for others.

We are a post-Babel people striving to be of one mind and one purpose, so let talk together, fellowship together, learn together, and let's just get to it.