

“The Foundation: Jesus Christ”

The Rev. Dr. Robert M. Zanicky

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*1st Presbyterian Church
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I Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:10-17*

During an ecumenical gathering, someone rushed in and shouted, “The building is on fire!” The Methodists gathered in a corner and prayed. The Baptists cried, “Where’s the water?” The Christian Scientists agreed that there was no fire. The Fundamentalists shouted, “It’s the vengeance of God!” The Lutherans posted a notice on the door declaring fire was not justified. The Quakers quietly praised God for the blessing that fire brings. The Jews posted symbols on the door hoping the fire would pass over. The Roman Catholics took up a second collection. The Congregationalists and Southern Baptists shouted, “every man for himself!” The Presbyterians appointed a chairperson who was to appoint a committee to look into the matter. The Episcopalians formed a procession and marched out in grand style, and the Unitarians toasted marshmallows!

From the inception of Christianity – there have been Christianities – and there still *are*! We are made up of thousands of denominations. We are Protestants, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and more – amid a myriad of cultures!

We are in the midst of “The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.” A wonderful thought. An ideal to respect and to learn from.

Last Wednesday I attended a special worship service at the Roman Catholic Cathedral – recognizing our foundation as multiple Christians – in Jesus Christ. A Presbyterian minister preached, our new General Presbyter, Rev. Barbara Smith. No doubt there have been too many divisions and harms caused by our parochial narrow minded conceptions about who *we* are and who *they* are.

From the beginning of Christianity, there have been Christianities! Sadly, tragically – from our earliest times and through history – sides were taken and much harm done. And from an early witness – we Christians continue to be chided and challenged to stop our petty egocentrisms and work and learn together.

Paul incredulously inquires, “*Is Christ divided!*” It’s a rhetorical question. He knows the answer. So do his hearers. “*No! Christ is not divided!*”

Christ exhibits God. Christ incarnates God. The ideal of faith, the promise of faith calls us to break down those walls that divide us.

God is one. We are many. We don’t hear and see very well. We often hear only familiar voices, tongues that don’t have accents. We keep the stranger – “strange,” (it’s more comfortable that way). We won’t have to “change” – they will though, if they want in.

We see through a very dim mirror. We’re 20/20 when it comes to our styles and fashions, but our sight degenerates when what we see looks foreign, different, odd.

“Is Christ Divided?”

Many, many, years ago, once upon a time, when Christianities were but infants struggling for identity, the Christianities were all too human.

Paul had organized a church in Corinth. Sometime later he gets word that the church is having problems. He is extremely concerned, for this church was birthed into existence by his work. He knows these people. He has lived with them. He knows that Frank can lose his temper; that Margaret’s feelings get hurt easily; and then there’s Simon and Susan and there...(well, you get the picture).

Today’s issue of “Christ divided” is but the beginning of a litany of confusions. In this letter Paul covers such things as rules of moral conduct; lawsuits among church members; marriage rights (did you know you had some?); food sacrificed to idols; and other domestic and theological issues.

Paul appeals to them, “Please get it together! Be united! I’ve heard from Chloe’s people that you are quarreling.” (I’ll bet Chloe’s people didn’t get too many dinner invitations after this letter.) This church is becoming, or had become divided. Diversity is okay. That’s the nature of the beast. Paul has written elsewhere about diversity, the Body of Christ – many different members – but united in function for the health of all the body.

There are several self-interest groups around the church, something like first century P.A.Cs. They had their own agenda. There were the Apollos, Cephas, Christ and Paul groups, to name a few. If you weren’t of my group, you were out.

Paul’s bewildered at them:

“You mean you’re saying,
I’m Paul’s group.
I’m Apollo’s group.
I belong to Cephas’ group.
I’m in Christ’s group?”

“I can’t believe it!”

Even those saying, “I’m in Christ’s group” were wrong. They were refusing to accept the teaching and help, from Christ’s followers, such as Paul and Cephas.

The Churches of Christ must be open and gracious to each other!! Paul is boiling by this time! (He isn’t known for his shyness, or lack of conviction.) Paul lets loose with what to me fits as Christianitie’s inauguration slogan for all times. You say, “I’m of this one, I’m of that one.”

Do you hear yourselves? “Is Christ Divided?” Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Paul’s sarcasm is now running rampant. “Thank God I didn’t baptize any of you, except Crispus and Gaius – so you don’t say you were baptized in my name. Heck, I don’t even remember who I baptized.”

“Christianities – Get it together!”

Faith in Christ is to bring us together, not separate us into factions. Now here's where it gets muddy, we being people of clay. God is one. Christ is not divided. But we are many! So, where do we go from here?

We commit ourselves to acts of love and justice, as did Jesus, the reflection God.

We allow ourselves to see the "other", the always mistrusted, hated Samaritan, as a possibility of God's grace.

We open ourselves to growth, to the possibility that God's reality is actually larger than ours. That just maybe I can learn something more about life from Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and "yes" from that Jewish or Muslim neighbor.

The God that Jesus Christ incarnated is one. We are the many. And we must struggle and search to find that oneness of being.

Is Christ Divided? I don't overly care if the Lord's Supper is viewed as the veritable body and blood of Christ; or a real presence. I'll be happy to participate in some mental gymnastics, but what I care about is what takes place in people's lives because of that Sacrament. (And more takes place than most of us know.) The Lord's Table - but one example.

Wednesday Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants of many stripes worshiped together at St. Peter's Cathedral – toward unity. We were not yelling out,

"I am Calvin,
I am of Wesley,
I am of Rome,
I am of Constantinople?"

Is Christ Divided?

Recognizing our differences – culturally, historically – we "together" witnessed to our unity in Christ. Yes there are Christianities – but there is one Jesus Christ, one foundation!

We Christians took up an offering – to be sent to Haiti; standing on our foundation – Jesus Christ.

Amen.