

“Have the Same Mind”

January 22, 2023

1st Corinthians 1:10-18

¹⁰ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

¹² What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Matthew 4:12-23

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — ¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

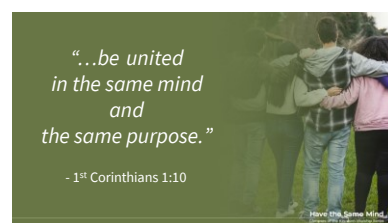


In our Epistle reading for the day Paul says, “*Have the same mind.*” And he goes on to tell us to have the same purpose.

This is the crux of Paul’s writing that we have before us

today. I will argue that that is the underlying theme in this week’s gospel lesson as well. As we wrestle today with what it means to have the same mind and purpose of Jesus Christ, let us begin with a word of prayer...

In verse 10 Paul appeals to the church as his “*brothers and sisters*” in Christ Jesus and he calls the church to “*be united in the same mind and the same purpose.*”



Before we delve into what Paul means by these words and into what these words mean for our own lives, let’s ask a real question: Is this possible? Could we, right here and right now, come up with a list of our core beliefs as brothers and sisters in Christ and in fellowship together here at Grace United Methodist Church?

Much like we did when we sat around the tables in Fellowship Hall many months ago and came up with the four core values that define our church, could we distill our beliefs down to a handful of statements that explain to the world who and what Grace United Methodist Church is as a people of God? While it seems possible to me, I also recognize that it would be a challenge to come up with a handful of statements that we could all agree on that would also sufficiently explain what it means to be a member of this body of faith. That was the struggle when we defined our values. We could probably all agree on a couple of beliefs. For example, we'd probably all agree that Christ died for our sins. The struggle would come in explaining how we lived out that belief in practical, everyday ways.

Today, as one considers the world that we live in, to an outside observer, I would argue that having the same mind appears to be very important to many of us. Many if not all people would argue that it is paramount to be right, to stand firm, to hold onto one's core values and beliefs. Except that in most cases there are two minds. There are the democrats and the republicans. There are the conservatives and there are the liberals. There are the fundamentalists and the progressives. The list could go on and on. Each group – whatever group that is – believes that they hold truth in their hands. If you are not in their group, well, you are simply wrong, misguided, or worse.

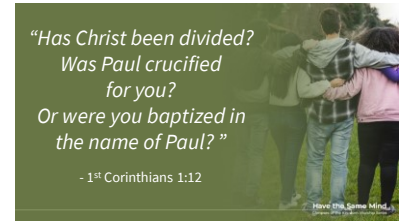
Perhaps a modern baseball analogy to help us understand the division. Growing up in Connecticut I was a Red Sox fan. But it always felt like that wasn't quite enough. I often felt like I had to hate the Yankees to be a good Red Sox fan. This drawing of lines, this creation of division, that was what was happening in the church in Corinth.

As Paul addresses the church in Corinth, this is part of the problem. Each group in in its own little camp. They are right and everyone else is wrong. That's why Paul begins by saying this same thing in many different ways. Just in the opening verse Paul appeals to these brothers and sisters to "*be in agreement*" and to live in such a way "*that there be no divisions among you.*" The church is being torn apart because they cannot agree or find a way to have the same mind and purpose.

In verse 12 we find the basics of what is causing the division and quarreling in the church in Corinth. It seems that there are four factions in the church. Some are following Paul, some are following Apollos, some are following Cephas, and some are following Christ. Today, we might say to our friends and neighbors, 'I am UCC, I am UMC, I am Catholic.' In the church in Corinth, each of these people had their own group of followers. Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth. He was educated and well-spoken. For these reasons, some were loyal to Paul. But some preferred Apollos. He was from Alexandria, a very cosmopolitan city, was very well-educated, spoke eloquently and persuasively, and he stood up bravely against the local Jews.

There were others who aligned with Cephas or Peter. These would be the mostly the Jewish Christians, those who still held to most of the Mosaic law. They claimed tradition and orthodoxy. And then there we those who said they followed Christ. This group claimed to be the "true believers." They thought that they were the only ones really following Jesus, the only ones being "authentic." For the members of each of these four groups, the one person that each group followed was just another teacher to play off of and against other teachers. Turning to verse 13 we begin to gain insight into whose mind and purpose the church is to be centered in and upon.

Here we read, *“Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* Paul is trying to focus the church back onto Christ. It is Jesus who died for them. In baptism, it is the power of Jesus’ name that is called upon to invite the Holy Spirit into that person’s life. Jesus is the center. He is the one to who all belong. Paul is using these questions to try and counter the natural tendency towards philosophy and intellectual debate present in Corinth.



Corinth was a city that prided itself on being a Roman city on Greek soil. Both of these cultures greatly valued intellectual pursuits. One simply built upon another. When a wise teacher or philosopher or a person with some expertise in a field of learning would come to Corinth, a large crowd always turned out to hear them speak. When Paul mentions that he preached *“not with eloquent speech”* in verse 17, this is what he is trying to counter. Good teachers and eloquent speakers sought to make disciples for themselves. Inadvertently this is what Apollos had done.

Now, when Paul encourages the church to *“have the same mind”* and to work towards the same purposes, he does not go on to explain exactly what that means. So I ask, do you think that Paul is implying that we have to agree on every single point of doctrine and ethics? Do you think that he is implying that we all have to read the scriptures exactly the same way? Do you think that Paul is implying that you and I all have to apply the word to our lives in exactly the same way? Certainly not. Differences are inevitable. We are all human beings who were made and raised differently, who have had a myriad of individual experiences.



Each of these factors means that we will each read, interpret, understand, and apply scripture in our own unique way. So, then, my friends, what is the bottom line? How do we know when we have drifted too far from the accepted thought process, too far down the line of following Apollos or Paul or whomever else?

To answer these questions, let us return to the beginning of our first reading. Once again, it is here that Paul addresses those in the church as “*brothers and sisters*” and that he appeals to them “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This first term – brothers and sisters – implies a familial connection. But this is not a blood is thicker than water analogy. No, Paul is reminding them that they are connected, that they are united, that they were made into a family not by blood but by the life and witness of Jesus Christ. Even when conflict arises, which is inevitable, Paul wants those in the church to remember that there needs to be a sense of connection, a belief in community. For Paul, even in conflict, one of the primary efforts must still be to build up the body of believers.

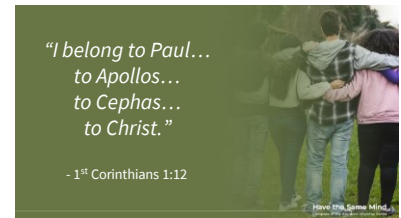
Conflict is at the center of this letter to the Corinthian church. Paul is writing this letter to correct behaviors and understandings that he thinks are wrong, that are not of Christ. Second, by appealing to them “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” Paul seeks to center them on Christ. But before Paul turns to addressing the issues that are creating conflict, Paul centers them on their connection to and belonging with one another in and through Christ. It is from this place that Paul then first addresses how they are to work through conflict when it arises.

Because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul says, there are ways that we will go about making our arguments about reading, interpreting, understanding, and applying scripture in our own unique ways. He states that there are behaviors that we will not accept as we seek to learn and grow in our understanding of Christ.

Addressing what has been happening in the church in Corinth, Paul says that we will not tear each other down. We will not point fingers or call names. We will not take these conflicts out into the public square or onto Facebook or Twitter. This is a call to high behavior, no matter how upset or frustrated we become.

In these opening verses, there is nothing about giving up or giving in as the church works towards finding ways to have the same mind and to serve the same purposes. In verse 12 we find a key to how to work this process. Here we

read: *“I belong to Paul... to Apollos... to Cephas... to Christ.”* It is in this verse that Paul is telling the church and us to listen as well as we speak. As he details how some

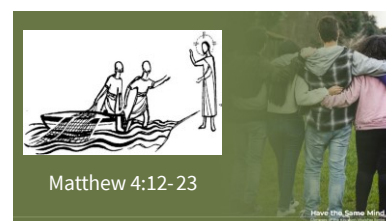


claim to belong to Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Jesus, he is addressing what we call “confirmation bias” today. This is a habit that we can all fall into – we only listen to those who confirm what we already believe or hold to be true. We are comfortable here, in the echo chambers that simply repeat our understandings and beliefs. Rather than digging into the source of those beliefs and being willing to be challenged and to explore other ways of thinking, interpreting, and applying, we hunker down.

Christ? Why did Paul include Christ on this list? Shouldn’t Christ be the antidote to all this division rather than being a source of greater division?

This would be true in the best of situations. As followers of Jesus Christ, we can and should always look to Christ to be the arbiter of our conflicts and disputes. But we do not like arbitration. It requires that we present our case and then submit to one that we agree has the power and authority to settle the matter. It requires give and take. It requires meeting somewhere in the middle as we find value and worth in the other's point of view. Today in our church world, we too often claim that Christ agrees only with my point of view. Too often in the church world we can imply that to disagree with me is to disagree with Christ. And we can even, at times, imply that the other isn't really a Christian, after all, if they do not see, understand, interpret, or apply the word just as we do.

But, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus is not our exclusive property. Jesus is not my exclusive property. He is not your exclusive property. We cannot claim that only we follow Christ. So, who is this Christ that we follow? Please turn with me to Matthew 4 as we look back upon the first steps in Jesus' ministry.



As our gospel passage begins, we learn that Jesus came to fulfill what was written by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus relocated from Nazareth to Capernaum. There is some significance to this move. John the Baptist had been arrested and there was tension in Israel. Capernaum was a city in Galilee, in the land "*of the Gentiles*." This city had recently fallen under Roman control, but it had a long history of being Assyrian. Two of the original twelve tribes of Israel – Zebulun and Naphtali – were given this place as their territory. Capernaum sat at a crossroads in history and was a place of new growth and cultural change. It was a place ripe to begin a new ministry.

In Isaiah 9, verse 16, we read that a “*great light*” would come to those “*living in darkness*.” As this light in the darkness, Jesus proclaimed a message of repentance, preaching that “*the kingdom of heaven has come near*.” In his kingdom, Jesus came to invite all people to be a part of bringing heaven near, of loving God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of loving neighbor as self. To do so, Jesus would invite people to follow him. In verses 18-21 we see Jesus calling the first disciples. He came to the seashore to invite first Andrew and Simon and then John and James to leave their lives behind to follow him. In Jesus there was this irresistible authority that drew forth a radical obedience from these men and many others. “*Immediately*” the scripture reads. This word speaks to Jesus’ irresistible authority and to the radical obedience that characterized the disciples’ lives.

Jesus came to invite his followers to study his example, to learn to live and love as he himself lived and loved. For three years, twelve men followed and lived with Jesus, spending almost all of their waking and sleeping hours with this man. For three years these men and many others demonstrated a radical obedience to the irresistible authority of Jesus Christ. A question for us to consider is this: how do we and our lives mirror this radical obedience?

With these four fishermen in tow, Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching and teaching and “*proclaiming the good news of the kingdom*.” The good news was multifaceted. It was an invitation to salvation and to a life filled with peace and hope and joy. It was an invitation to healing – not just physical but emotional and spiritual and relational as well. This invitation was to wholeness and to life abundant. And the good news is an invitation to live in community, in fellowship, in connection.

These core beliefs form a high view of Christ. This understanding of the good news is at the core of what we hold closely to as followers of Jesus Christ our Lord.



Turn back with me to 1st Corinthians 1 as we delve into how and why we are called to live as disciples of Christ, into how we are to live with the same mind, the mind of Christ. Paul

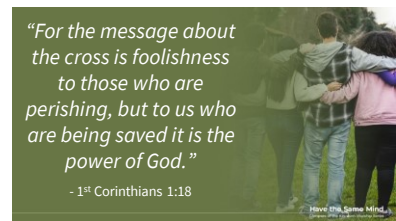
too wants to hold a high view of Christ, to focus on the larger view of the emerging movement known as Christianity. Paul too wants to focus on the proclamation, on the good news and on the life change that comes with knowing Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the church is really trying to define what they believe – to come up with a set of core beliefs that would enable people outside the church to access this good news. But in doing so, they got lost in the weeds. Each group was dead set on convincing the other groups in the church that their faith, that their take, was the only right one. From Paul’s perspective and from the perspective of folks outside of the church, this “discussion” was not pretty. The slinging mud and calling names, it did not reflect well on the church or on Christianity. And quite frankly, why would anyone want to be a part of that? There’s plenty of that stuff in the world.

These words about how to be the church – about how to allow one another to keep Christ at our center as we each read, interpret, understand, and apply scripture in our own unique ways yet together as the body of Christ – these words apply today. Paul is asking the church and us as individuals to consider how our squabbles look to the wider world. The world doesn’t get wrapped up in our finer points of theology.

The world only sees how we treat one another when we disagree with how to read, interpret, understand, and apply scripture. When one side accuses the other of breaking their covenant with God and one another because they read a passage one way and that side then tells the world that “those” folks over there don’t believe in salvation or even in Jesus, then all the world sees is ugliness and strife and hatred. Then, my friends, the good news of Jesus Christ doesn’t really stand a chance in the world. Then, my brothers and sisters in Christ, then our common Methodist witness in the world is diminished, lessened, tarnished. Then, fellow followers of Jesus Christ, then we empty the cross of its power.

Paul refers to the power of the cross in verse 18. Here we read, *“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is*



the power of God.” The cross seems like foolishness to those who rely on human wisdom, to those who rely on self. But the cross is God’s power for those whose sights are fixed on heaven. They have learned that in their human weakness one discovers the power of God to save and to transform lives. They see in Christ one who was victorious over sin and death. In this willing weakness, in this act of surrender, Christ upended all human wisdom.

In this spirit and with this understanding, the gospel is given in the cross as self-sacrifice, as giving oneself up in response to and care for the other, as bearing the burdens of others. To bear this cross is not simply self-denial and resignation, but it is born with joy and with thanksgiving. To claim anything else empties the cross of Christ of its power.

The call to share the good news and to walk as an example of Christ remains as clear today as it was in Paul's day. Having the same mind as Christ, we need to watch how we live out our faith both within the church and out there in the broader world. Even when we disagree – and there will be times when we do



because we are human and we have different experiences and are wired differently – can we be of the same mind, can we come together in the understanding that Christ is the way of salvation and of hope? Can we come together around these core beliefs, finding this as our common ground, even as we continue to move in different directions?

Can we, my brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, live in grace and love always? When we do, we begin to paint a picture of what the good news of Jesus Christ is all about. When we choose to let grace and love lead the way in all we say and do, then we have the same mind and purpose as Christ. It is then that others will catch a glimpse of the kin-dom of God. As we seek to be examples of Christ's love and grace in the world, may we bring God the glory as we seek to share to one who brings wholeness, the one who gives life abundant to all who believe. May it be so for us all. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Think back over your journey of faith. When have you read, interpreted, understood, or applied scripture in a new way, leading to growth in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. It is natural to struggle at moments of disequilibrium – moments when what we thought we knew are challenged. Where are you feeling this concerning your faith? Pray (and study and read) to find a place of equilibrium once again.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 4. Based just on these four sections, what core elements of Jesus' ministry can you identify?