

3rd Sunday after the Epiphany 1/22/17
1 Corinthians 1:10-18 A

I APPEAL TO YOU, BROTHERS, BY THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT ALL OF YOU AGREE, AND THAT THERE BE NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU, BUT THAT YOU BE UNITED IN THE SAME MIND AND THE SAME JUDGEMENT...WHAT I MEAN IS THAT EACH ONE OF YOU SAYS, "I FOLLOW PAUL," OR "I FOLLOW APOLLOS," OR "I FOLLOW CEPHAS, OR "I FOLLOW CHRIST." IS CHRIST DIVIDED?

Did you hear about those new Ford pick-ups? Ford is making them with heated tailgates so that when they break down and you have to push them home, your hands don't get cold! Do you know why Ford pickup owners always take their dogs with them when they go for a drive? That way, when their pickups break down, they don't have to walk home alone!

I speak the truth in love as the proud owner of a **Chevy** pickup! Now, I'm not trying to cause offense, I'm just illustrating that there are things in life that we have our own opinions on. Sometimes, on some things, we could truly care less. But at other times, there are those things some feel quite strongly about; in fact, downright passionate about. Anybody want to talk playoffs this afternoon?

I call this your attention in light of Paul's words in our lesson this morning, "Is Christ divided?" Paul is teaching us that JUST AS THE HUMAN BODY CANNOT BE DIVIDED INTO PARTS AND PIECES, THE BODY OF CHRIST, HIS CHURCH, CANNOT BE DIVIDED INTO SECTIONS AND FRAGMENTS.

My Dear Friends in Christ, the Father and the Son are ONE. We are one with the Son and one with one another in the body of Christ. God unites and makes one. It is Satan who divides. In the Garden, Satan divided Adam and Eve from God. It wasn't long before the sin that divided us from God divided us from one another, and Cain killed his brother Abel.

Now, we live in a world where nation rises against nation, neighbor hates neighbor, family members bear grudges and hate, and the words “I will never speak to you again” are spoken and the door slams.

I must be very clear that our lesson is not talking about doctrine, the six chief parts of the Christian doctrine as you learned them from *The Small Catechism*: the 10 Commandments, the teachings of the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, Baptism, Office of the Keys, and the Lord’s Supper. We cannot be divided on doctrine.

Let me illustrate this. Today, January 22nd, marks the 44th Anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in America. The 5th Commandment teaches us, “You shall not murder,” and abortion ends the life of a living human being, so it is murder and a sin. On that, there can be no division.

What our lesson is talking about are those things that are not commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. The Christian life is lived under the banner of Christian freedom and, in our lesson, Paul is talking about disagreements in matters of Christian freedom.

For example, the Bible does not say that you have to love broccoli or that you are forbidden from eating broccoli. The Bible doesn’t say that you have to love football or hate football, or that you have to passionately follow one team. The Bible doesn’t say that you have to drive a certain brand of vehicle, or that you even have to drive a motorized vehicle. You are free to have a driver’s license or free not to have a driver’s license if you don’t want one. You are free to wear Nike or Asics running shoes, or even Brooks running shoes when you run, and you are just as free to absolutely despise running. You are free to have a favorite song, a favorite color, and

even a favorite flavor of ice cream; that is, if you so choose to like ice cream.

Allow me to use an example, and it's a hot-button issue. What time should we have church? I'm guessing I have your attention now.

Let me break this down even further, for the sake of illustration, ok? Let's say this side wants church at 11:00. It's just too hard to get up and get moving before that, especially when it's so dark and cold out.

This group likes having church at 8:30 just the way it is.

This group – these are the golfers and, for them, 8:30 is not even early enough. They want church at 8:00, so they can get to the golf course.

This group wants church at 10:00. That's not too early, not too late, and still gives you plenty of time to get to the coffee shop for breakfast before the other churches are out.

This group here – they don't even want to have church on Sunday mornings. Sunday is their day off and you want to sleep in, so they want to have to have worship on Wednesday night.

So, what do we do? First and foremost, we go to the Bible and the Bible doesn't say that we have to go to church on a certain day at a certain time. I caution you -- before you quite to me, "Remember the Sabbath Day," remember, Dear Saint, that the Sabbath Day was Saturday and because Jesus has come as our savior, God no longer requires us to observe the holy days of the Old Testament. We do not celebrate Passover, Yom Kippur, or the Festival of Booths. So, under the banner of Christian freedom, we have chosen Sunday because that is the day Christ rose from the dead. And, under that same banner we choose the hour that works best for the body of Christ; and no, whatever time that is, it is not going to be perfect for everyone.

But, you know the problem with that, don't you? What happens when you don't get your way? You seethe with anger, and that anger turns to self-pity, and bitterness and resentment, and it doesn't take long before you hate your neighbor. "I want," really means "I'm right," and anyone who disagrees with me is wrong.

It is interesting that Paul, the same man who wrote the words of our lesson, writes in Galatians 5 that divisions, quarrels, are the works of the flesh. God unites. He makes us one in Christ. Satan and his lies divide.

Look at Jesus. I think it can be legitimately argued that Jesus didn't get His way. What did He pray in Gethsemane's garden? "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Mt 26:39). Jesus could say, "I follow God". After all, "When Christ came into the world, He said...'Behold, I have come to do you will, O God,'" the book of Hebrews says (He 10:5,7a). And, that meant going to the cross to die for all the times you disobeyed God, for all the times you harbored bitterness and resentment against your neighbor, all the times you refused to be reconciled and live at peace with your neighbor. Jesus took those and all sins and carried them to the cross, and there He bled and there, He died. And that means that you are forgiven, reconciled to God and to your neighbor.

Paul also writes these words, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Ph 2:3-4a). We have that mind of Christ because we have been baptized into Christ and Christ lives in us and we live in Christ, and that means we treat our neighbor just as Christ treats us.

Let me be clear: you are very much entitled to your own opinions. God does not expect or demand of us that we be robots, without passion and emotion and feeling. Being a Christian, a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, or Concordia Lutheran Church does not mean that you cannot have your own ideas, thoughts and opinions on those things on which God's Word is silent. You are free to love broccoli or hate the stuff. But, hating it, or loving it doesn't make you better, or worse, than your neighbor. Eating broccoli or loathing the smell of the stuff does not make you a better Christian, or make God love you more.

The Father and the Son are one, and we are one with Christ and with one another. Satan has been conquered and he cannot divide us. Christ and His Body are not divided.