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Epiphany 4
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The Wisdom of Man Divides The Cross of Christ Unites

1 Corinthians 1:10-18 ¹⁰ Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³ Is Christ 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 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. ¹⁶ Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Today our text talks about division and unity. In the greek we have the word skismata and katertizo. Skismata means division, and katertizo means to make whole.

Now this hymnal was a good and useful thing. It was made for a purpose and when it was whole it served that purpose well. But the more division there is the less useful it becomes. And the more difficult it is to make it whole again.

It is very easy for me to rip and divide, but I cannot make it whole again.

My wife is very good at putting books back together when they have been torn, but even then they are not whole again, they are not perfect.

It is easy for human to tear apart, and create division but it is only Christ who can make us whole. This is what the Corinthians found out. The more that they rely on their own wisdom the more divided they became.

Paul pleads with them to lay aside the wisdom of man and rejoice instead in the foolishness of the cross of Christ which through the forgiveness of sins makes whole that that which man tore apart.

The Corinthians were divided in thinking and in purpose.

Our text says “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” The greek here is noi and gnoomae. Noi is understanding. Gnoomae is purpose or plan.

You can think of the first one as understanding where you stand, where you come from, where you are.

The second one then is looking forward to where you are going, your purpose, your plan.

How can we work together, how can we possibly be united unless we are agreed on both. We must understand who and what and where we currently are and being united in our will and desire for the future where we are going.

If you and your wife look at the map. And you say, "here we are south of Kingston," and your wife says, “No here we are north of Ripon.” It doesn’t matter that you are both trying to get to Markesan. You are not going to agree on the correct direction to go.

Noi and gnoomae, where we are and where we are going. We must be united in understanding and in purpose if we are to move forward. As a family or as a church it doesn’t matter

As an example let us consider how this will work in a perfect family.

Aaron says to Jackie, "Let's do A."

Jackie says to Aaron, "Lets do B."

Aaron says to Jackie, "No I really think we should do A."

"Ok," says Jackie "Let's do A."

So they do A. It blows up in their face. What does Jackie say to Aaron?

Jackie says to Aaron, "We decided to do it. We tried it. We failed. Let's figure out where to go from here."

That is an example of being perfectly united. They discuss what to do, but once they decide they are perfectly united. It is no longer Jackie going along with Aaron on his plan. No they are together. That of course is almost never the way it actually happens.

Instead most of the time what happens is Jackie says to Aaron, "I told you so. Your plan was stupid. You should have listened to me."

The wisdom of man cannot unite us because each of us sees things different and each of us assumes I know best. Our wisdom is only going to divide. This is just as true in a marriage as it is in a church.

But Christ unites us through the promises of God. What do the promises of God say?

Romans 12:4-6 ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*:

And also

Matthew 18:20 ²⁰ "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

In Christ, whether we are talking in a marriage or in the church we know that we each have a gift and a responsibility. It is not one of us that is wise and one that is foolish. But rather one sees this need another see this one. We come together and all share whatever gifts or wisdom or insight we each have, then we make a decision. Once we make a decision it is not his plan or my plan or their plan it is our plan. This is the promise of Romans 12. That in a church or in a family, it is not him or me or we versus them, but it is always and only us. This is the promise that we can and should work together for a single purpose.

But now we have in Matthew 18 an even greater promise. Not only does Christ promise that each will have his own gifts to contribute but that even if as few as two are gathered together He is there with them. This is a twofold promise from Christ. 1. That Christ will guide and lead our discussion and bring out of it His will. 2. That when decision are made together in His name, He will bless those decisions.

So then it is not him or her or them or we or I, but it is us with Christ united in mind and purpose. A unity that only Christ can give.

The Corinthians were divided by factionalism

In verse 12 through 16 we find that one of the problems with the Corinthians is that they were divided by factionalism. Each one thought this one or that one is the best preacher. And we can understand their attitude, although it is not a good one.

One of factions was of Paul. Now Paul was a great missionary but a poor speaker in person.

2 Corinthians 10:10 ¹⁰ "For *his* letters," they say, "*are* weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible."

Apollos on the other hand was a very eloquent speaker. And then we also have here Cephas, which is the name that Jesus gave to Simon, whom we usually call Peter. Cephas is the Aramaic form of the Greek word Peter.

So we have the apostle Peter, Paul and Apollos. Paul the great missionary, Peter the great Apostle, Apollos the great speaker. Which was better?

Some said, oh look how great Paul is. He planted all these churches all over Asia. Others said, oh no look at how great Peter is he is the chief Apostle and was on the mount of Transfiguration and was chosen by the Lord. Still others said oh no look how great Apollos is, he is so easy to listen to.

I'm sure there have been similar fights here in our church as well. Each one choosing which pastor they like best or what they like in a pastor best.

Once again the so called wisdom of man divides us. But Paul puts a kabash on the whole thing.

"What matters is not whether it was Apollos or Peter or Me," says Paul. What matters is not how eloquent or funny or entertaining or wise a speaker is. What matters is regardless of who is speaking, regardless of his personality or abilities, whether Peter, or Apollos or Paul we brought you Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. We each are only the messenger, but the message is Christ and His cross.

Imagine you live in a village 1500 years ago. In comes a herald from the king. He makes his announcement. The king is sending gold to help rebuild the village after a devastating earthquake. Are you going to say to that messenger, "We like the other messenger better? Go back and send us the guy that came last year."

If it becomes about the preacher we will be divided, if it remains about Christ we will be united and made perfect in His love and forgiveness. The message is what matters not the messenger.

What united them was greater than what divided them

Ultimately I don't care what divided them, or what divides us. If you learned something from Paul here (not that it is from Paul but that it is from God) to be better united in your marriage or in church, good. But even if we go one bickering about the color of the carpets and the stain glass windows or any other such thing until the end of time. Even still we are united, we are united in Christ and in the power of His word.

To the unbelievers Paul says this is foolishness. It is emptiness

Paul uses the word *kenothae* in verse 17 . This is the same word he uses in Philippians 2:7 speaking of Christ's humiliation:

Philippians 2:7 ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

He emptied himself of His power. Christ emptied himself of his power and glory in order to save us from our sins. But the cross of Christ must not be emptied. It is the power of God unto salvation.

And in fact the Cross cannot be emptied of its power. In that cross we have the forgiveness of sins and the way to heaven. The cross is the power of God that opens heaven to us.

But to the unbeliever it is empty because they cannot see its value. They cannot see its worth. As Jim Carey says as the Grinch, "One man's toxic waste is another man's potpourri." To them it is worthless junk, but to us it is the sweet smelling victory, the power of God through the forgiveness of sins.

They look at that cross as a piece of garbage good for nothing but to be thrown on the trash heap. But we recognize it as the fantastic treasure that it is. They are willing to give nothing for the cross. We rejoice to give up everything for the sake of that one most precious treasure. We know that the cross gives to us forgiveness of all our sins.

So even if we are divided on every possible opinion. Still Christ unites us in this one most important truth we are sinners, the cross of Christ forgives our sins and opens heaven to us.

What does Paul say at the beginning of our text? I plead with you, I beg you, “be united.” He starts out pleading because he knows how impossible it is that we should find a way to be united in our own wisdom. He ends with Christ because he knows that in him we are perfectly united.

Noi and gnomae – what we are and where we are going, understanding and purpose. We are sinners who have been washed in the blood of Christ. We are going together to heaven, and on the way we are walking in the word of the Lord. United in Christ!

Amen.