

Pastor's Message
May 10, 2020

Greetings my friends!!

Greetings from my house to yours. I hope you are staying warm and dry as we experience this May's cold spell (aka polar vortex).

I wish all of you blessings on this day that we remember our mothers. This year, this day may be filled with such a range of emotions as the traditional dinners and visits will lack that personal contact and there may at best be waves instead of hugs and conversations through the use of technology instead of in person.

On Thursday, May 21st instead of the usual way we have done Food Pantry, Helping Harvest (formerly the Berks County Food Bank) will be hosting a Mobile Market on our parking lot. The food has been pre-packaged in boxes and large bags and will be placed in the clients cars as they proceed through the parking lot. Distribution will begin at 1:30 and end either at 3:30 or when the food is gone. Please share this info with people who are in need of food.

We will continue to worship via Zoom on a Sunday morning at 10:30 until we can physically come back together. If you would like to join us, send me an email at gselc4201@gmail.com and I will see you the meeting information.

May God's Peace be with you.

Your sister in Christ,

Pastor Denise

Acts 18:1-10 and Corinthians 1:10-18

Acts 18:1-10 New International Version (NIV)

In Corinth

18 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”

Corinthians 1:10-18

1 Corinthians 10-18 New International Version (NIV)

A Church Divided Over Leaders

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, ^[a] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas^[b]”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Christ Crucified Is God’s Power and Wisdom

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.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

Let us pray

Holy Lord, within your church, your followers have often allowed their disagreements to get in the way of being faithful to your word. Remove any barriers our communities face that prevent us from sharing your word and building up your church.

Amen.

Remove any barriers our communities face that prevent us from sharing your word and building up your church.

In this morning's text, Paul writes to the Corinthians about the man-made barriers that were spouting up within the young fledgling church in Corinth. It seems that groups were pledging their allegiance or their loyalty to the messenger instead of the message. They considered themselves followers of Paul, or Peter or Apollos, because it was through these traveling evangelists that the people of Corinth have come to know of and about Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

Although the core of the good news of the gospel was always the same: God loved his chosen people so much that he sent his beloved Son Jesus to come and live among us, so that through his life, death, and resurrection we could be redeemed and forever live in right relationship with God the Father; there were differences in the ways the evangelist presented the message. It seems that the people in Corinth began to lose their focus on the message and began to differentiate themselves from one another with regard to which evangelist they preferred.

Paul urges the people of Corinth to be:

United in Christ – united through Christ – united by Christ

It seems so simple, we as Christians are to be of one mind with all of our brothers and sisters who profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

But instead of letting it be that simple, that is rooted and united in Christ himself and the ways of Christ; the Corinthians seemed to have the need to outdo one another. It reminds me of when James and John asked Jesus for the highest place of honor in his kingdom. They wanted to be known as the greatest of all the disciples. What they failed to realize was that in God's kingdom there was no room and there was no need to be elevated above their brothers and sisters.

And just as the different groups of Corinthians wanted to be known for how they were different from one another, this has also been true of the Christian church throughout the ages. Paul reminds us to come back together and unite ourselves in, through and by the one who has come

to save us, the one who has come to serve us, and the one who has come to love us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Paul reminds the Corinthians and Paul reminds us that we are to be of one mind in Christ and to focus our efforts on doing as Christ has commanded us: to love one another as God has first loved us.

During the time of this pandemic, loving one another as God has first loved us looks and feels different than it did two months ago. And how to be of one mind with Christ as we walk through these unprecedented times while at the same time trying to do our best to live out our Christian vocation is a huge unknown.

This past week a small group of us met to decide what we would do about this month's food distribution. It certainly would not be safe for clients and volunteers to come together in the way we always did to distribute the food. But, people desperately need the food probably now more than ever.

I hear Jesus say – feed my sheep. I hear Jesus say – whatever you do the least of these, you do to me. When I was hungry, you fed me.

I hear Jesus say love one another and do not bring harm to one another

Being of one mind with Jesus, you would think that there should be one clear answer, but not in these times. In these times, we need to stretch beyond how we have always done things and pray to be inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit to find new ways to be both safe and feed the people.

And with the help of some of our community partners, we did find a new way to distribute food this month. On Thursday, May 21st, with the help of Helping Harvest (aka the Berks County Food Bank) we will distribute food by setting up a drive-by Mobile Market on the parking lot. The boxes and bags have been pre-packaged on-site at the Food Bank so that they can just be put in the cars as people drive through our parking lot. This will be a way for the volunteers to be safe through social distancing, while at the same time providing food to those who are truly in need at this time.

So as we strive to be of one mind with Christ perhaps the questions we need to keep front and foremost as we wrestle with the challenges we are encountering are: What would Jesus recommend we do? And what wouldn't Jesus want us to do?

I believe that Jesus would want us use all the tools and resources that we have available – the science, the data, the community partners, the governmental resources, and all of us thinking together to figure things out. And we will need to use all those tools as we struggle to answer the question that is front and center in all of our minds: When can we get back together in the church building?

And before I go any further – take a moment and ask yourself what do you believe that Jesus would want us to do? And what would he want us not to do?

Certainly not put anyone in harms way.

Certainly not prioritize one group over another.

Certainly not cause friction between parents and their adult children.

There are no easy answers to this question of when we can go back to physically worshipping together. But as the body of Christ, planted here on this corner, we are reminded by the Apostle Paul to put Christ at the center of that conversation. And we can do that by using all the tools and resources that God provides us and by asking ourselves what do we believe Jesus would want us to do.

For Christ is the cornerstone upon whom this church has been built and it is on that rock that we will forever stand.

And it is in Christ, through Christ and by Christ that we have been brought together and united as a community of faith, even when we worship by reading or hearing this message in our own little corner of the world.

May the peace of Christ be with you!

AMEN

Blessing

May the God of covenant faithfulness enfold you;
The beloved Son encourage you
And the Holy Spirit descend upon you in blessing you this day and forever more.
In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

AMEN