

1 Corinthians 14:12b-20
"Building Up the Body of Christ"
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (C)

February 6, 2022
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro: The Issue in Corinth]

The Corinthian church was a deeply troubled congregation. At the start of his letter, the Holy Spirit guides Paul into writing, ***"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 judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers"*** (1 Corinthians 1:10-11).

One of the most troubling aspects of the church in Corinth was a sense of superiority on the part of some members of the church.

Typically, the distractions at the Corinthian church came from the worldliness outside the church. You see, the city of Corinth was a very large city with a population of nearly a million people. And like any large city then and now, comes many distractions. Added to this is the fact that Corinth was a port city. In fact, it had ports on each end of the city. Being a major port city, this brought commerce, but it also brought with it much sin.

Corinth was a city of wealth, a city of luxury, but what it was most known for was that it was a city of immorality. Corinth was a city well known for sexual immorality and drunkenness.

But Paul is not writing here about the distractions coming from the outside. Here, Paul is writing about the distractions that are coming from within the church in Corinth.

The issue here is that divisions are mounting within the church in Corinth as outsiders cannot understand what is being said – and many of the faithful at the church are also unable to understand.

Evidently, those who spoke in tongues were convinced that they were better than those who could not speak in tongues. They believed they had an increased value over the non-tongue speakers. Paul's point is that if no person is able to interpret the tongues, then you are not building up the church. The speaking of tongues may be beneficial to the one speaking in tongues, but to everyone else, it just sounds like pure nonsense. If there is no interpretation, then the tongue speaking is worthless. It isn't edifying the church. It isn't building up the body of Christ.

In a similar way, often our sinful nature leads us to want more when it comes to the Sunday Divine Service. Sometimes, we focus on our feelings, instead of being satisfied in receiving the gifts that God gives us.

Today on this Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, the Triune God is leading us not to focus on ourselves, but instead on Jesus as He leads us in building up His Body, the Church.

[Understanding the Good News]

Back during the time of the Reformation, there was confusion within the church of the Holy Roman Empire – *of what is now known as Germany*. You see, throughout their daily life, they would speak German, but when they entered church, they would hear the Mass in Latin. Some understood parts of the service, but most people did not understand much at all. The issue here was understanding.

Martin Luther was also frustrated with this. So, as part of the Reformation, he created the Divine Service to be spoken in the language of the vernacular, the language of the people. With his reforms, the people spoke the liturgy in German, the people sung the hymns in German, the people heard the Scripture readings in German, and they heard the Scripture interpreted in the sermon in German. At last, these people could say "Amen" and know what they were agreeing to.

This is the issue at hand in Corinth, many within the church were saying "Amen," but they didn't know what they were agreeing to. With this being the case, the church in Corinth was not being built up.

Foundational to Paul's whole discussion about tongues and worship in the church is that Christ is the head of the Church. Christ's own head bore the crown of thorns in His passion. Christ's own head bowed down in death – His atoning death on the cross. Christ's own head was lifted up in His bodily resurrection. Christ's own head received the crown of glory as He bodily ascended back to heaven.

Christ is now our head of all things in heaven and on earth. He is the head of His body, the Church, in a rule of grace, love, and forgiveness. This means that the Church is to live together and seek to build itself up as one caring and unified body.

This, we need to hear and understand! Even today, as we correspond using the English language, we still need someone to interpret God's inerrant Word. There are times when we become distracted in the Divine Service, as we think about lunch, afternoon plans, or something catches our eyes or ears that end up distracting us. And even if we pay the closest attention, we may still not understand what we just heard spoken in the Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel lessons. This is why we have a time of interpretation, known as the sermon. In the sermon, we hear God's Word interpreted through preaching.

Still, even then, our minds may wander, but when we have questions about God's Word, we know who to ask – God's called and ordained pastor.

But besides listening to the pastor, how do we build up the church? Well, instead of trying to impress people by how much we may know, try building each other up through teaching and catechesis. Through group Bible studies, we build each other up. Through attending the Divine Service faithfully together, we build each other up.

From this, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to instruct others. We speak in a way that others can learn. Paul says to the Corinthian church and to us: "I want to speak of Christ and His sufferings, death, and resurrection for the salvation of souls, so they can hear this message." So, when we instruct others on who Jesus is and why He matters, we become fishers of men. By sharing the love of Christ, we build up the church!

You see, it is through the good news of God's truth that builds up the church. This is why Luther put together his Small and Large Catechisms, where he taught God's six chief parts – The Ten Commandments, The Creed, The Lord's Prayer, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and The Sacrament of the Altar. There, in the catechisms, Luther interprets what each Chief Part means, so all may know God's Law and Gospel. And, with each section of the catechisms, Luther confirms God's truth with an "Amen" by saying "This is most certainly true."

There, Luther places Christ's net, so that every follower of Christ would know the proper teachings of the one true Christian faith and be able to share God's love with others.

Since we all have been bought and paid for by Christ, through His death and bodily resurrection, we ought to learn and take to heart all that God has done for us by bringing us peace. So, as His new creation, we strive to excel in building up the Church.

God teaches us to ***“let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God”*** (Colossians 3:16).

You see, God desires worship that enables “Amen.” God desires worship that catechizes the confused. God desires all divisions to cease. God desires that His Church be built up as the Body of Christ.

Paul raises some sharp questions not only about the practices of the Corinthian church, but also about the church's life in any age. Unclear, confusing, or noncommunicative speech in the church fails to edify the church.

For us this day, we are to always recall that through Baptism, we ***“are the body of Christ, and individually members of it”*** (1 Corinthians 12:27). In other words, Christ is our head, and we are His body, the Church.

As the Head, Christ leads us to forgive one another as He has forgiven us. Here, in the Divine Service, He shows His love for us through His Means of Grace – Word and Sacrament – as He strengthens our faith and forgives our sins. He leads us away from a self-centered life as we care for the needs of others. He, alone, unites us as His body as He builds us up! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠