

Sermon 1 Corinthians 1 10 18 3rd Sunday after Epiphany Series A

Sermon: 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 (v.18)

Theme: Cross of Christ (2nd FELSISA's Value)

Goal: Nothing but the cross of Christ is the reason for unity in the church

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We are going through the Core Values, Mission and Vision of our Synod FELSISA during this Epiphany Season. They are St. Thomas' Core Values, Vision and Mission as well because we are united with other churches in a Synod. The 1st Core Value is God's Word Alone and we studied it last Sunday. The 2nd Core Value is CROSS OF CHRIST, and the text for this Sunday focuses on only this: Paul's statement on the Cross of Christ as the reason for His ministry and the reason for the unity of the church. He wrote: "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!" And a little further he wrote: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

I – The cross of Christ putting aside

It seems that the church in Corinth was forgetting the cross of Christ, not focusing on the cross anymore, but focusing on personal issues. Instead of focusing on the cross of Christ and on the mission of the church to proclaim the crucified Christ to all as Paul had done while he was there, the members were focusing on personal interests and on people, causing divisions and quarrels in the church. Different groups were formed around some leaders of the church. Paul is very clear in identifying the problem when he wrote: "My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I

follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." *The text implies that the Corinthians identified with various factions on the basis of whoever baptized them, thus turning the unity given in Baptism into disunity and discord* (Series A, 46). It's something like as St. Thomas members would quarrel about some issue and some would say, "I follow Pastor Hupper"; the other, "I follow Pastor Dieter", and the other, "I follow Pastor Walter". Do you think it would solve the problem? NO!

Divisions are always caused by human nature. We are different and we think different. But we have something common that unites us: We were all baptized and we have all the same faith. We belong to the same Christian family and we all received the same grace of God.

In his argument against divisions, Paul raises two questions that expose the foolishness of taking sides with one or another leader in the church: "Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

If the focus is not on the cross of Christ, every one of us can go astray, following our own ideas.

II – Divisions are not a good testimony and cause scandal inside and outside the church

Although the Corinthian congregation was "not lacking in any spiritual gift" (v.7), it still managed to hinder the work of Christ. The church cannot be weakened by internal strife. (Series A 46). Because of some special gifts of the different leaders, and because of the numerous spiritual gifts owned by the members of the church, the focus was not on the cross of Christ anymore as it was at the beginning of the church there, but the focus was on the personal gifts, as we read especially in Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians.

St. Thomas has a story of division. Those who “survived” that period know that the church did not benefit from it; on the contrary, rather, many people abandoned the church. Divisions and quarrels in the church are terrible for the mission of the church. They are not a good testimony and cause scandal inside and outside the church. Who wants to join a church that is fighting inside itself? If we fight for the truth of the Cross of Christ, like Luther did it in his time, it’s O.K. But if we fight for self-interests, what is the outcome?

III - The cross of Christ is central for unity and for good witness
We have to manage our differences like in a choir: different voices, but singing in harmony. If the choir sings in dissonance, it is not pleasant to hear it. It takes time to sing well; it needs lots of rehearsals. Every singer has to sing according to the music, and not according his own wish.

Jesus mentioned when He was talking to Nicodemus ^(John 3) that in the episode of the poisonous snakes in the wilderness, all who wanted to be healed had to look in one direction only: To the bronze snake put up a pole by Moses. And so, Jesus said, we have to look only to the cross of Christ to be healed from our sins, to receive life, and to get strength to surpass our own nature’s will. The cross is central in our life and in our faith and therefore it is on the central part of our altar as well, so that our eyes are always attracted by the cross, bringing unity to our worship.

The Core Values booklet, which is available to all families, says: *We believe that central to the message of salvation is the “Cross of Christ.” In Christ God enters this world, dies on the cross for our sins and reconciles us with himself again. God thereby overcomes the power of sin and the devil not through mighty acts of glory or eloquent speech, but in weakness and helplessness, epitomised by the cross of Calvary.*

As such we believe that the crucified Christ does not prevent hardship per se, but is always with us in a suffering world and in all things works for the good of those who love him. As only the cross provides us with the assured hope of God's love and eternal life, we proclaim the crucified Christ faithfully.

If we work for unity under the cross, as Paul highlights it so well in our text, God will bless our efforts. Let's read the two texts of 1 Corinthians again: "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!" ... "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Conclusion: The goal of my ministry among you is to confirm all of you in God's grace by preaching the cross of Christ, and to share this message of the cross with as many people as possible so that others also may come to the true faith in Jesus, crucified for our sins and resurrected for our justification. My prayer is always that God bless His Word of the Cross in the hearts and lives of all listeners and of all who read the sermons on the Internet as well.

Without the cross there is no church; not just as a symbol or as a pendant to be worn on a necklace or a symbol put on the wall; but due what happened on and through the cross: Our sins were paid by Jesus and we were reconciled with God, our Father. Focusing our eyes on the cross of Jesus, we walk together as a united family, brothers and sisters in Christ, following the path God has chosen for us, surpassing stones and thorns, difficulties and temptations, walking together with gladness because we know what is waiting for us behind the cross: The glory at the house of our Father! Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 26 January 2014