The Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Rolling Meadows - 1978

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IN NOMINE JESU

1 CORINTHIANS 1: 10-17

No one who is familiar with the New Testament can escape the conclusion that God intends that those who are DRAWN TO HIM BY FAITH and LIVE WITHIN HIS GRACE through XP shall LIVE IN UNITY with each other. JESUS knew that His disciples would have trouble with this. On the night when He was betrayed, as He so earnestly talked with them in the Upper Room, He said: "BY THIS ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER." And then He prayed that "THEY MAY BE ONE" even as HE and the FATHER ~~were~~ are ONE..... UNITY OF MIND AND PURPOSE -- LIVING IN LOVE AND HARMONY -- ONENESS IN CHRIST ------ these are GOD'S INTENTIONS for His family. Our LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER identifies us as DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

It is this LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER, this CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER that distinguishes the Christian Church from the rest of humanity. SEPARATED FROM GOD in an attempt to "make it on their own," they end up being SEPARATED FROM EACH OTHER. So the human story is marked by STRIFE AND CONFLICT -- by HATRED AND PREJUDICE -- by SELFISHNESS AND GREED -- and by ALL THE OTHER INHUMAN THINGS people do to each other. Look around and mark how CONFLICT AND DIVISION can tear a family apart -- how NEIGHBORS can act in unneighborly ways -- how CRIME can ~~makes~~ make us walk our streets in fear. This FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN PROBLEM is not just OUT THERE SOMEWHERE. It is also at our own DOORSTEP. It is even in our own HEARTS.

It is to such a world that GOD COMES to TURN THINGS AROUND. ISAIAH caught a glimpse of it when he wrote: "THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT." MATTHEW saw these words fulfilled as Jesus began His ministry. The CORE of His message was: "REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND." CHANGE YOUR MIND -- for the REIGN OF GOD IS KNOCKING AT YOUR DOOR! A NEW KINGDOM HAS ARRIVED! A NEW DAY OF LIVING TOGETHER IS HERE. God is creating a NEW PEOPLE -- the SOCIETY OF THE TWICE-BORN -- a FELLOWSHIP in which people will find PEACE WITH GOD and PEACE WITH EACH OTHER..... So it is that this NEW SOCIETY which we confess as "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" is "A LIGHT SHINING IN THE DARKNESS" because "He who is THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" even Jesus X our Lord lives and moves within it. It is a "CITY SET ON A HILL THAT CANNOT BE HID."

We can understand then why Paul was so troubled as he wrote to the CHURCH AT CORINTH. Word had come to him that the congregation was TORN BY DISSENSION. The people were not getting along together. They were dividing into COMPETING GROUPS, based on which APOSTLE had led them to faith. One group identified with PAUL -- another APOLLOS -- another PETER -- and another claimed they belonged to CHRIST..... Instead of rejoicing in their ONENESS IN CHRIST, they were splitting off into SEPARATE GROUPS -- each one UNCERTAIN about the INTEGRITY of the other.

So St. Paul confronts them: "I APPEAL TO YOU, BRETHREN, BY THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS

CHRIST, THAT ALL OF YOU AGREE AND THAT THERE BE NO DISSENSIONS AMONG YOU, BUT THAT YOU BE UNITED IN THE SAME MIND AND THE SAME JUDGMENT." St. Paul was not just offering some sound advice -- but he was calling on the AUTHORITY OF CHRIST HIMSELF to set things right. It was immaterial WHO baptized them! The OVERRIDING TRUTH was that they had come into a NEW KINGDOM OF LOVE AND GRACE -- and this determined that they should live in PEACE AND HARMONY WITH EACH OTHER.

It may seem to us that these people at Corinth were HUNG UP on UNIMPORTANT MATTERS --- but that is JUST THE POINT! Time and time again the UNITY OF THE CHURCH has been threatened by turning MINOR MATTERS into MAJOR ISSUES. We all have our HIDDEN AGENDAS -- those SELF-PROTECTING MOTIVES that drive us to make BIG ISSUES out of SMALL ONES. Our PRIORITIES can easily become confused so that we lose sight of the fact that it is CHRIST WHOM WE SERVE and NOT OURSELVES.

"IS CHRIST DIVIDED?" That question leaps out at us from our text. How can we speak a RECONCILING WORD OF FORGIVENESS in XP to a fragmented world, if we ourselves are NOT RECONCILED TO EACH OTHER? How can we bring HEALING to the gaping wounds of the human family, if we ourselves are NOT HEALED? How can we SHARE THE WARMTH OF GOD'S LOVE to LONELY PEOPLE, if we feel ISOLATED and ALONE and RETREAT FROM EACH OTHER? How can we speak of the VICTORY OF CHRIST over all the FORCES OF EVIL IN THE WORLD, if we ourselves

are defeated by the SUBTLE EVILS that creep into our own lives?

We cannot speak of LOVE to the world, if we ourselves act in UNLOVING WAYS. Nor can we press upon others the DEMANDS OF JUSTICE, if we are UNFAIR TO EACH OTHER. Nothing less than the CREDIBILITY OF THE CHURCH is at stake -- and that is why St. Paul spoke so pointedly to the Church at Corinth. The KINGDOM OF LOVE AND GRACE is not a PIOUS THEORY hovering on some distant horizon --- but it is the LIFE-TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE of those who have found their place within it. If, indeed, we are the PEOPLE OF GOD -- set in THIS PLACE at THIS TIME -- we will be drawn by the POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT to REACH OUT TO EACH OTHER. We will not be HUNG UP by MINOR MATTERS -- but we will see that the THINGS WHICH UNITE US are far greater than the THINGS WHICH MIGHT KEEP US APART. It is CHRIST who holds the family together -- and the CLOSER WE ARE DRAWN TO HIM, the CLOSER WE ARE DRAWN TO EACH OTHER.

In a world anxiously searching for PEACE -- in a world where people urgently need to HELP EACH OTHER ----- GOD IS CALLING HIS CHURCH, UNITED IN LOVE AND PURPOSE, TO LEAD THE WAY! You and I -- by our Baptism -- are a part of this NEW SOCIETY of HIS KINGDOM. Strengthened and nourished in the HOLY SUPPER, we live within HIS GRACE AND LOVE. Out of these UNLIMITED RESOURCES -- in the places where we LIVE AND WORK -- we can DO OUR PART to make the DREAM OF UNITY AND PEACE come true. Amen.