



## The Word ...

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me...by Chloe's people that there are rivalries among you. "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning. *(1 Cor 1: 10-13, 17)*

## Pondering the Word ...

Every so often I look back on what I have written in the past about a particular passage. Sometimes, I find not much has changed in 15 years (e.g., this week's reading about kingdoms or houses that are divided—same story, different year)! But on this passage, I notice a change from what I had written before, and I'm sorry to say it's not a change for the better.

In 2014, I wrote about strides being made in Christianity to bridge the differences between denominations. It seems that while some of this work continues, it is more within denominations that cracks and divisions—some serious—are being seen and acted upon.

Like is the case with so many issues, the media focuses on the sins and abuses of the leadership and the institutions, be they religious or governmental. I know there are millions of dedicated civil servants who work hard for the good of others, and servants of Christ all over the world who are united in the same mind and same purpose in his name. These dedicated people sacrifice every day, and there are clearly many more of them than there are those who by their desire for power make a mockery of the gospel.

I'm saddened that this infighting only serves to lessen the meaning of Christ's cross. As Gandhi once said, *"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."*

## Living the Word ...

I encourage all of us who call ourselves Christians to pay attention to Jesus and his words and actions. Yes, we know him only through the writings of the four evangelists; and yes, early church leaders like Paul put their spin on things as well. But Christ is not and will not be divided, no matter how much our human egos and power struggles try to do so. And I believe those who continue to work to divide the Body of Christ will be judged harshly by the one who came to unite all people under one God. *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."* Where will you shine Christ's light into the darkness of division? How will you work today to multiply Christ and his love? What will you do to be a "repairer of the breach?"

## Personal Reflections and Ideas...

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**Mon, Jan 23:** *"But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit...is guilty of an everlasting sin"*(Mk 3:22-30).

When he was baptized, Jesus experienced God's Spirit coming upon him, filling him with holiness. Here, the scribes accuse him of being possessed by an unclean spirit. How are we to know the Holy Spirit from an unclean spirit, especially in these times when nations, churches, families are divided, warring within their ranks?

**Reflection/Provision:** *"This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood...God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him"* (from 1 Jn 4). Anyone who preaches hate, violence, or prejudice against anyone or groups of people does not possess the Holy Spirit. All of us are guilty now and again of badmouthing someone or a group of people; this is pretty normal human behavior. But anyone who preaches hatred in God's name and does not allow that name to change their hearts blasphemes against the Holy Spirit—the God of love.

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**Tue, Jan 24:** *"I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me, he put a new song into my mouth"* (Ps 40).

**Reflection/Provision:** Last week, we spoke about newness and freshness, looking at how we honor God, not through rote rituals emptied of their meaning, but by breathing new life into those rituals and offering sacrifices to God in the way God desires: freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, working for justice, etc. In many of the psalms, we are told "sing to the Lord of new song," but in this psalm, it is God who has "put a new song into my mouth." If you are eager to add a new song or two to your repertoire, don't go it alone. Discern where God is calling you by asking the Spirit to lead you. Seek out advice from trusted God friends. Let God take the lead in composing a new song with which you are to praise the Lord!

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**Wed, Jan 25:** *"My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who spoke to me"*(Acts 22:3-16).

Why are Saul's companions not struck blind by this light? In the other versions of the story, the companions are described as hearing the voice and being knocked down, but none of them seem to have lost their sight.

**Reflection/Provision:** Paul needs to be knocked silly and shown his blindness in a visceral way. For some, it needs to be a dramatic event like this. For others, a change of heart is subtle, gradual, maybe even the result of witnessing another's conversion. What's important: God comes to each of us where and how we are. God invites us daily to change our hearts. Be on the lookout today for the light calling you to heal your blindness.

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**Thu, Jan 26:** *"I am grateful to God...as I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice"* (2Tm 1:1-8). **Reflection/Provision:** As usual, we get only a passing reference to the women in this story. There's a painting by Rembrandt, *Timothy and his Grandmother*, but even then, her name isn't cited! We do know Lois and her daughter Eunice are Jews (some suggest they might be related to Paul), and Eunice is married to a Greek, probably not unheard of in the Roman territory where Lystra is located. Still, this intermarriage may be a source of prejudice from the Jewish community. Maybe your role in teaching the faith is in the background or maybe it is frowned upon by the self-righteous who, because of your life situation, don't think you are "pure" enough. God always sees and greatly blesses those whose work is done without fanfare or in the face of prejudice. Take comfort and be joyful. Your name is written on the palm of God's hand.

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**Fri, Jan 27:** *Trust in the LORD and do good...Take delight in the LORD...Commit to the LORD your way; trust in him* (Ps 37).

**Reflection/Provision:** Read the entirety of Psalm 37. In these days when it seems evildoers prosper, the words of this psalm can restore our hope and trust in God's promises. The guidance is clear and concise: Trust in God. Do good. Take pleasure in God's presence. Commit your way to God. Be still before the Lord. Give up your anger and wrath. Wait eagerly for the Lord and keep to the way. Perhaps you want to read this psalm every day BEFORE you read the newsfeed! (Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once advised that we keep abreast of current events with the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other—wise counsel indeed!)

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**Sat, Jan 28:** *As evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples: "Let us cross to the other side"* (Mk 4:35-41).

**Reflection/Provision:** You've been following Jesus in familiar territory for a while now, maybe associating with some new people, but pretty secure. You know the lay of the land. Now he wants you to venture with him to another unknown, perhaps even foreboding place. What is "the other side" for you? How do you feel when Jesus informs you that's exactly where he's headed now? What is your decision? Do you follow?