

***10** I have a serious concern to bring up with you, my friends, using the authority of Jesus, our Master. I'll put it as urgently as I can: You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common. **11** I bring this up because some from Chloe's family brought a most disturbing report to my attention - that you're fighting among yourselves! **12** I'll tell you exactly what I was told: You're all picking sides, going around saying, "I'm on Paul's side," or "I'm for Apollos," or "Peter is my man," or "I'm in the Messiah group." **13** I ask you, "Has the Messiah been chopped up in little pieces so we can each have a relic all our own? Was Paul crucified for you? Was a single one of you baptized in Paul's name?" **14** I was not involved with any of your baptisms - except for Crispus and Gaius - and on getting this report, I'm sure glad I wasn't. **15** At least no one can go around saying he was baptized in my name. **16** (Come to think of it, I also baptized Stephanas's family, but as far as I can recall, that's it.) **17** God didn't send me out to collect a following for myself, but to preach the Message of what he has done, collecting a following for him. And he didn't send me to do it with a lot of fancy rhetoric of my own, lest the powerful action at the center - Christ on the Cross - be trivialized into mere words.*

The parsonage you graciously allow me to live in, is directly under the flight path of migrating geese. It's a beautiful experience, although a someone noisy one. They have an amazing air-control system, and it is fascinating to watch. Now, I don't know that Geese have a lot of conflict, I don't know if every flock has that one goose that just rubs all the other geese the wrong way...and everyone says, "Oh great, Bubba's on point today, it's going to be a long day." I don't know if geese do that. But I do know that geese seem to know more about holding a community together than people seem to.

Did you know that geese honk to one another when they fly because it helps them to stay focused on the task at hand: flying in a v-formation, getting somewhere safe with abundant food for the winter. Why do they fly in the V formation? Because they know that formation is best for the community. That formations helps the whole community save about 70% of its energy so they can fly further and reach their goal together. They honk because it is a way they encourage one another, which is why I think they really might have a Bubba in the group, "Come on ya'll, 'he's only got another 30 minutes up there, we can do this!" They honk because it is a way to keep the flock together, coordinated, and unified in achieving something. They honk as a way to telegraph it is time to change leaders, and then they all cooperate and shift, even when its Bubba's turn.

Maybe if there is one point to my sermon today it is, be geese.

Yes, I realize that is too simplified. Geese do not have the complexity of life that we have. Geese don't need to worry about the economy or immigration (well, I guess in a way they could worry about that), or women's rights, or health justice, or racial justice, or education quality and justice, or any of the other political hot topics the rest of us worry about. But don't we also need to worry about geese things...like working together to achieve goals, like saving energy, like talking and listening to one another so that we can head confidently in a safe direction that gets all of us to safe and abundant places? Don't we need to be worrying about the troubling places ahead and encouraging one another we will navigate those places together?

I think we should worry about geese things...but it doesn't feel like we are worried about those things...it feels like we are more worried about being in the group that leads and taking the best spots along the way so that we can get there first and claim all the resources before other groups, following other leaders, get there. We don't care if our neighbors make it, they want different things than we do, so who cares where they end up- which isn't at all geese-like. And of course, when we are determined not to get along for the common good, we end up in conflict...striking together...

It is true that two objects cannot occupy the same space...one object must displace the other, defeat the other, push the other out of the boundary of belonging...and maybe that is the reason we are so passionate about our differences, we fear being the one pushed out, displaced, or defeated. We fear being the one whose voice is ignored, whose needs aren't met, whose desires aren't cared about, because...well...we aren't geese, we've lost trust in each other. So, mayhem ensues as we strike and struggle and wrangle for our voice to honk the loudest and determine the direction for the whole flock. Mayhem seems an accurate word to describe the political landscape we find ourselves in. The definition of mayhem is *needless or willful damage or violence*. That is what we hear every day it seems...a call to violence or damage that is justified by our fear of others and, specifically, I think of being displaced or pushed out by them. What do we do with that fear? I think we have to look to Jesus, the one who often said, "fear not."

The Apostle Paul worked to establish a church in Corinth. He witnessed about Christ, he taught them about Jesus, he showed them how to live a life of unity and love and harmony...and as soon as he leaves, they break up the choir and establish a bunch of solo acts. You get that right? For a choir – if they want to achieve their goal of sounding beautiful, they have two choices...they can sing in unison...or they can sing in parts...each note slightly different but part of the same key...harmony...they can harmonize and with different voices can achieve beauty.

Paul established a church centered on Christ's love and grace. He established a church so that others would know Jesus, find forgiveness in Jesus, have their lives transformed in Jesus, find joy and worship and praise and purpose in Jesus...but the church became more interested in being centered on Paul, or Apollos, or Peter. They stopped looking to Jesus to navigate their way and they started looking to Peter, or Apollos, or Paul. They lost their harmony because each decided to sing in a different key. And of course, we know how easy that is to do. Especially in an election year. Especially when you are part of a purple community. It is easy to become divided over our political affiliation and lose our focus on Jesus and how he taught us to live and to love. We get caught up in this idea that there is only room for one party and the other must be pushed out, rather than trying to work together to ensure there is room for one another by our willingness to expand our boundaries of belonging, improve our communication, and unify our goals for a life that thrives.

Differences are natural, we don't all think alike. We have different visions for what it means to thrive, but that doesn't mean we can't find harmony. I want us to notice Paul's plea to the church. He doesn't ask them to start thinking alike. He doesn't say, okay, everyone just need to think like me and forget the other guys...nor does he say, "Let's all agree with Apollo," or "Let's align Peter on this one." Look what he says, "You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common," or in the NRSV you notice is says, "be united in the same mind with the same purpose." Does that mean in total agreement? No, it means they are to remain united in the mind of Christ and in the purpose of Christ. It is a call to be considerate of our differences and to cultivate our commonalities.

Cultivate is an interesting word choice – it means to prepare a field for growth, for receiving seeds that will flourish and be fruitful. To cultivate a life in common would be to prepare relationships that will flourish and be fruitful out of their commonalities. Have you noticed how little of our political discussions are about fruitful and flourishing communities? It seems most are about how "other people" want to ruin your flourishing and steal your fruit. We are being taught to fear one another instead of find commonality with one another. We are constantly being bombarded with fear and that keeps our anxiety high and our tempers short. When we fear, we are not thinking clearly, we are focused on surviving.

At our Wednesday Community Conversation, one participant told of a story they heard about how the 9/11 attacks had impacted children. Adults were so hyper focused on the tragedy that they kept their televisions tuned to coverage of the attacks, not understanding the terror it was causing the children, who were unable to process that the news footage was replaying the attacks over and over again...for the children, they thought the attacks kept happening ...they thought building after building was being hit, every replay was a fresh horror and created a very anxious generation.

Have we stopped to consider this happens when we watch cable news for hours on end? We hear the same stories over and over with new commentary that incites new fear, anxiety, and, if we aren't careful, hate at those we deem as the cause of our fear...which often is our neighbor...our family members...our coworkers...people we have far more in common with but we will let our fear of their differences destroy those relationships.

What would happen if we just turned off our TV news and talked to each other? What would happen if reasonable Republicans and Democrats sat down together and set some common goals for thriving communities? What if we stopped letting fear rule and let love have a chance? Isn't that, after all, the mind of Christ?

Didn't Jesus pull people to his table who others considered a threat to their reputation and livelihood? Didn't Jesus ask questions and refrain from judgement? Didn't Jesus offer grace and mercy, rather than threatening, dehumanizing, and condemning? If our political discourse has no similarity to the ways of Jesus, should we not rethink our discourse, or at least how our politics is expressed and lived out? Can we not disagree on solutions and yet still come to one? Can we not all love alike, even if we can't think alike?

Christ, crucified, knew a thing or two about political violence and the power of fear. Yet, Christ also knew of the power of resurrection...of righting wrongs and becoming fruitful. Christ knows of the power of love and the joy of being one with God and one with each other. Every act of healing, every simple invitation to dinner, or life-lesson offered, was about overcoming our tendency to push aside and to instead embrace.

Christ came to unify, not divide...to bring peace, not fear...to restore harmony out of our created mayhem. So, let us remember to keep Christ at the center of our political reflections...and when we look at each other, let's not see red or blue...let's see purple...let's not see Republican or Democrat...let's see...geese...a community that knows it can't thrive without mutual encouragement, focus, shared leadership, and the ability to help others bear the weight of the journey.