

Do You Want to be United

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Texts: Corinthians 1: 10-18 (New Living translation)

Hello First Church! It is so nice to be back, I was home in Honduras sharing life with my family and friends being grateful for our livestream that kept me connected every Sunday to you all. I am honored to be up here this morning, if we haven't met before, I would love to connect as I keep learning alongside this beautiful community.

Friends, would you pray with me, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you Oh God, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen.

To be of one mind, to be united in thought and purpose.

Now, let's sit with that for a moment. When I first read this passage the first thing that came to mind was oh Paul, if you would have been here at this moment in time you would have known it is easier written than done. Here is where it helps to remember the beauty and nature of correspondence, it is destined for one group of people, and we only have one side of the conversation. Coming from our previous Sunday where we got to celebrate the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and listened to the poems that united us together changed my view on what unity in mind can look and feel like. You see, when I read unity, I immediately confused it with uniformity. I could have gotten lost in this rabbit hole of the idea that what Paul wanted for the Church of Corinth was for all to think and talk the same. Now, this letter might not have been written for First Church from our friend Paul, but I think we can agree that the spirit of division, and confusion is one that we all have experienced either individually or communally.

Harmony is not an easy task. Now I am no musician, but one thing I do remember from middle school music class is how surprisingly hard it was for all to harmonize. I could see the teacher's frustration as he directed us, and I could also see the lack of interest in others to do so. There was no connection, there was no passion behind our desire to be in harmony with one another. At the end of the class when no harmony was achieved, all we did was to look who to blame which just made things worse. When I look back at this memory, I think about the joy and

difficulties to come as one to advocate for justice as a community. What happens when things are not always clear and there are so many factors influencing our decisions.

For this I want to bring a very special voice and presence into this place. She has taught me the beauty behind the power of prayer and the unity of community that despite all odds their hearts were one and their mind was one when it came to seek for freedom. Harriet Jacobs was an African American woman enslaved in the U.S.; she was confined for seven years in a space where she had to stay hidden from her master. She was able to stay hidden by the unity of all of those who believed that her freedom was going to be theirs as well. Her house is right around the corner in Story Street, her legacy of freedom and faith is near us. I know that no matter what I say I will never do justice to how much the spirit of Harriet has transformed the life of others. Harriet reminds us of what Paul might have meant when he was talking about the power that can be behind a community -uniting and seeking harmony. Before these verses, Paul was addressing the gifts that this community had, yet the weakness found in their desire to keep them in solitude. Harriet's life after freedom was a result of gifts and courage coming together through her brother, grandmother, friends, and those who believed that if only one could achieve freedom, that was going to be freedom for all. The extension of the blessing through Harriet was enough for all of those who helped her escape.

I know life after a just society and united communities as mentioned before is not an easy journey and most definitely it will not be perfect. In many cases it can be disheartening when we see that evil wins. I have cried tears of anger and frustration reading headlines of injustice and wonder when will it ever stop? Yet, in 1 Corinthians I find a glimpse of hope, I hear Paul saying:

But I did not baptize you.

When I think of the disunity and detachment of love that causes injustice in our communities, I remember in whose name I have been baptized in.

Did injustice baptize us? Where we baptized in the name of division? Where we baptized by the leaders of our countries? I wish to believe that they don't. We are baptized in the name of the Holy trinity, and it alone has the power to bring us out of the waters of oppression and heartbreak.

The beauty of it all is that we were also baptized in front of our community in the name of Christ who calls us out of the waters and into the never-ending life journey of community.

When Harriet reached the North after escaping in a boat, she came out of those waters as a free woman and her journey for freedom to her community back home has just begun.

Harriet's unity to her children, brother, grandmother, and friends is what kept her going as she continued to fight for freedom in the north, because as we can see things where not perfect here either. It is easy to lose our vision and passion for something when we think we are alone. It is easy to not desire unity when there is no connection to those who we share our pews, those who sit next to us on our daily life. Injustice and oppression win when it achieves its goal to scatter and dehumanize that who was made to be one, whole, and dignified.

Harriet was the guiding voice that made me connect that what Paul saw in the danger and result of disunity was death and injustice. Yet- there can be new life and baptism of freedom happening at the same time, shedding death, and bringing life from the same wound of injustice. I am thankful for Harriet's life, and I am thankful for the God she believed in and the power behind the cross.

The power of the cross is not in our hands, but what is in our hand's beloved is the power behind the choice of whether we will come together and be one. The cross will not lose its power, and its power is not in the suffering that it represents but, in the desire, to stop putting more bodies in those conditions. When the pains of injustice kicks into our heart and minds, let us remember that the cross has not lost its power and neither does our capacity to come together with the power of love.

Paul asks us Has Christ been divided into factions. Other version says, "Has Christ been cut into little pieces"

I wish to believe that Christ's Body was not broken to divide us, his body was broken to unite us as the body of Christ. A body with all its different parts that could never look exactly like the other but fit together to be a body of justice and love. We don't take pieces of his body and scatter; we were created to come together with the bits and pieces of love to bring healing to

our aching bodies.

Friends, in my short time at first church I have seen what it looks like to come together in unity. Last Sunday when we gathered as one to celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. life and celebrate with poems. The first of each month when we break bread together, when we share our altar with the children, when we celebrate the long-time members, baptisms, worship, moments of grief, moments of sickness, and more I could keep going. We have seen the sweetness and power behind our Sunday service, my prayer is for us to not forget that warmth throughout the week. When we feel that we have been scattered and hiding our gifts and become fearful to give and receive love, let us be reminded of the faces gathered here today, because there is still so much to be done, so much to be healed in our community, harm that was caused by ancestors who believed that they were baptized in the name of oppression and so they did. It is time for our generations to come together and remember truly who do we follow?

More importantly, do we want to be united?

Finally, my dear friends, just as we think that our journey behind unity and accountability in has come to an end or reached its peak, or that we have reached the full definition of love, healing, and justice.

Let prayer in unity be like the never-ending ocean waves that carry our bodies to the shores of where it all began. So- we gather again, not to be in a perfect community where there are no struggles, but despite **of- -----we gather.**