

“Knit Together”

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Rev. Dr. Mary Jane Hitt

How many knitters do we have here this morning? I’m a knitter too. There’s something therapeutic and meditative about taking a couple of knitting needles and a skein or two of yarn and transforming it into a sweater or a shawl or a hat or a dishcloth. Of course we use the word “knit” to mean more than just yarn and needles. We talk about teams being knit together – about close-knit friendships – about bones that knit as they heal. So today’s scripture caught my eye when it speaks of siblings in the church being “knit together in the same mind and the same purpose”.

In today’s text, Paul is writing to followers of Jesus in Corinth. That community was struggling with issues ranging from worship practices and church leadership to sexual morality and dietary standards. But he doesn’t go right to those practical matters. Instead, he begins his letter by addressing a more fundamental concern: quarrels that had developed in the community based on people’s loyalty to their various spiritual mentors. Some identified as Paul’s people, while others identified with Apollos or Cephas (better known to us as Peter).

That has a modern, familiar ring, doesn’t it? Quarrels among the various branches of Christianity around the world, and in our own country, are far too common. We rather like our way of being Christian, and we often distrust or even scorn those whose understanding and practice differ from ours. Take, for example, one of my clergy colleagues in Ohio. Just a few days ago he was confronted on Facebook after posting a positive reflection on Bad Bunny’s Superbowl halftime show: “You’re a morally bankrupt sinner,” his challenger wrote. “You are a pastor. You should know better.”

Quarrels among Christians? Yes. Yes then. Yes now. So what are we to do? Paul appealed to the Corinthian church that they all be in agreement, and that there be no divisions among them. But on its face, that isn’t much different from saying “Let’s all just get along”, is it? A lot easier said than done. And so it’s important for us to see that Paul didn’t leave it there. He went on to say, “Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Here, right at the beginning of a letter that has determined so much of our understanding of church – here, before Paul addresses the issues that divide the people, he reminds them (and us) of the centrality of baptism. Baptism, a sign and seal of our incorporation into the body of Christ, is what unites us. Baptism is our shared identity. And so each week we pour water into the font and remember who we are.

Followers of Jesus are, in fact, quite diverse, theologically and economically and racially and in every way we can imagine. But we are united to Christ in our baptism. That unity does not negate our diversity. In fact, our unity is made stronger because of our diversity, when our ultimate loyalty is to the crucified and risen Christ.

Today we will ordain and install officers for this congregation, and they are a diverse lot. They bring to us differing life experiences, differing opinions, differing skills, differing ideas, differing church backgrounds. Chosen by God through the vote of this congregation, they have accepted the call to serve as deacons and elders alongside your pastor. We are grateful for them and for the diverse gifts they bring – gifts that make this congregation the beacon of light that it is in our community and beyond.

We will remember that in their baptism they were claimed by the love of God, clothed in the grace of Christ, and anointed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to share Christ's mission in the world. We will ask God to equip them for ministries of compassion, service, and witness in The Way and Spirit of Jesus. We will pray for God to grant them wisdom and understanding as they care for and nurture this community, weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice.

We will entrust our ruling elders with the responsibility to watch over us, providing for our worship, nurture, and service. We will ask them to share in church government and discipline, serving in councils of the church as they show the love and justice of Jesus Christ. We will pray that they might be discerning as they guide the congregation, working for justice and wholeness in ourselves and in the world; that they might have wisdom and understanding as they lead us in Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion.

We will charge our deacons with teaching charity, urging concern, and directing our help to the friendless and those in need, while they too show the love and justice of Jesus Christ.

But let us remember today that in our baptism, we *all* are called to ministry. We have been claimed by the love of God, clothed in the grace of Christ, and anointed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to share Christ's mission in the world. As we ordain and install officers, let us also renew our individual callings to be Jesus' hands and feet in a world so desperate for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Let the church say Amen.