

*“In Christ, We Are One”*

January 23, 2011

---

Noah benShea’s delightful little book, *Jacob the Baker: Gentle Wisdom for a Complicated World*, describes various encounters a simple sage named Jacob has with various people and the lessons learned.

In one story, a man on a mission stops by the bakery to see Jacob: “Jacob, I have come to invite you to take up ‘the cause’ with me!”

“I am only a baker,” said Jacob.

“Come on, Jacob,” said the man, waving his hand with contempt at the factory, “you are much more than a baker.”

“Really,” asked Jacob, “How much more could I be?”

“It is written,” said the man, “that we are to be a light unto the nations.”

Jacob had seen this form of self-inflation many times and was clearly not comfortable with it.”

“To be a light unto the nations does not mean we are to put the spotlight on ourselves. It means we must all know we are living in the dark, and it is our mutual ignorance that reminds us we are brothers and sisters.”

“I see the light,” asserted the man, hoping to invoke Jacob’s interest.

But Jacob recognized the look in the man’s eye and replied simply, “...good,” leaving the other man to pick up his argument....

As soon as he was out of earshot, a woman ... [said], “Well, he shouldn’t have treated you that way.”

But Jacob was not confused about who he was, “The part of that man that I did not like is also a reflection of me.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Noah BenShea, *Jacob the Baker: Gentle Wisdom for a Complicated World*. New York: Ballantine Press, 1989. 99-102.

*“In Christ, We Are One”*

January 23, 2011

---

Conflict in the church is as old as the church. From the beginning, there have been struggles. We see conflict in Corinth, so it shouldn't surprise us when it shows up at Pennside. The question for us is – how can we “be united in the same mind and the same purpose” when we do not agree? Does unity require uniformity; must we conform to someone else's point of view and surrender our independence? Must we surrender our independence and meekly “go along to get along,” or is unity something richer, something deeper than anything we've ever known?

Brothers and sisters, in Christ we are one.

*1 Corinthians 1:10-11 (NRSV) Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.<sup>2</sup>*

Paul doesn't waste words. Every word in his letters is intended to further his point. So when he calls the Corinthians, “brothers and sisters,” he's not engaging in idle rhetorical flourishes. He needs to address them somehow; and oh, the choices that may have come to mind! I can see Sosthenes lifting up his quill as Paul paused, lost in thought. A few choice words came to mind, but they would only antagonize and further divide. How could he shift the Corinthians from thinking of themselves as individuals so that they could see they are part of something far larger and grander – the Church, the body of Christ?

Brothers and sisters, in Christ we are one in Christ. We are family. We are united by a bond that is deeper and richer than the bonds of class, ethnicity, gender, political point-of-view, or how I feel about the issue of the day. We are united by a bond that is deeper and richer than worship style – contemporary, traditional, or blended, or whether we prefer an early service or a later service. We are united by a bond that is deeper

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

*“In Christ, We Are One”*

January 23, 2011

---

and richer than anything on which we may disagree; we are united by a bond of blood – the blood of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, in Christ, we are one!

“Some joker said once that church fights are the nastiest because the stakes are so low. They didn't mean that Christ doesn't matter. Rather, they meant that compared with Christ, nothing matters as much.”<sup>3</sup>

The Corinthian conflict can be summed up in one pronoun – “I.” “I” may just be the most troublesome pronoun in human language. For when we think in terms of “I”, we lose sight of “we,” of “us.” Ends quickly justify means, and “I” am willing to throw “us” under the bus, because “I” am right and “you” are wrong. And it is more important that “I” be right than that “we” be “us.”

What difference would it make if we chose to draw closer to those with whom we disagree rather than pushing them away? What witness to the “foolishness of the cross” would we offer to a divided and divisive world if our disagreements resulted in a stronger bond rather than in the traditional, “I’m taking my toys and going home?”

Brothers and sisters, in Christ, we are one.

Bishop Desmond Tutu offers a helpful corrective to our Enlightenment fascination with our individuality. In response to Descartes’ famous, “I think, therefore, I am.” (*Cogito ergo sum*). Tutu espouses *ubuntu* theology, Ubuntu means “I am what I am because of who we all are.”.... Tutu writes: “One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu - the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality - Ubuntu - you are known for your generosity.”

“We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects

---

<sup>3</sup> [http://day1.org/585-tttalkin\\_bout\\_your\\_generation](http://day1.org/585-tttalkin_bout_your_generation)

*“In Christ, We Are One”*

January 23, 2011

---

the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

Brothers and sisters, in Christ, we are one!

The following from an email devotional illustrates this point of view: It comes from one of Anthony De Mello's collections of religious wisdom from different traditions:

The Guru asks his disciples, "How can you tell when the night is over and daylight has come?"

One answers, "When you see a tree in the distance and can tell if it is a neem tree or a mango tree."

"No," said the Guru.

"When you see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it is a donkey or a horse," ventures another.

"Wrong again," said the Guru.

"How, then, can you tell when the night is over and day has begun?" they ask.

"When you look into the face of any man and recognize your brother in him; when you look into the face of any woman and recognize in her your sister. If you cannot do this, no matter what time it is by the sun it is still night."<sup>5</sup>

Brothers and sisters, we are united by a bond that is deeper and richer than anything on which we may disagree; we are united by a bond of blood – the blood of Jesus Christ. In Christ, we are one! Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu\\_\(ideology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(ideology))

<sup>5</sup> *Written by Calum I. MacLeod, Executive Associate Pastor. September 15, 2010 Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Ill, devotions*