

January 25, 2026

Third Sunday After the Epiphany

“The Name That Unites”

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

It’s still around, but you know one phrase that used to be frequently heard in politics but you don’t hear so much anymore? “Diversity is our strength.”

I always thought it was kind of a silly idea. Not this it isn’t true in some situations. I mean, if you’re brainstorming for a solution to a problem or something like that, sure, more diverse ways of thinking lead to more and different ideas and ways to come at a situation. But it was taken to the extreme. Diversity trumped merit. Diversity trumped competence. Diversity in many ways was the highest priority in everything because, “Diversity is our strength.”

Not true. A commander shout to his troops, “Charge!” and they all head in diverse directions. Not good. Not strong. Look at our country today. We have two very, very diverse political ideologies and the chasm between them seems to be getting wider every day. Are we a country stronger for it? And in the church, if we have diverse views on what sin is, what righteousness is, what the path to salvation is; are we stronger for that, or just quite confused? Diversity is diversity. Sometimes it simply isn’t that helpful.

St. Paul calls Christ’s church to unity, not diversity. *“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”*

Sounds good, but is this even possible? This isn’t a real large group here today, but do you think we could possibly all agree on everything? Forget everything; do you think all of us could be 100% in agreement on all things theological? I guarantee that if we went through some of the less clear passages of Holy Scripture we would come up with some differing viewpoints. Of course, as the pastor, my viewpoint would be the correct one, but we’d still have divergent opinions.

This problem is plain in the church throughout history. Divergent teachings were plaguing the church very quickly; nearly every New Testament epistle calls on believers to reject the false doctrine being spread. In 1054 the church split in two parts, East and West, over differing understandings, polity and practice. Then in the 1500s Martin Luther came along freeing the true Gospel of Christ’s free grace, but that also led to the fracturing of the church into all the reformed denominations we have today with divergent teachings and understandings.

So today we have church bodies that struggle to maintain unity within their own denominational confession, never mind seeking unity beyond that. And, in some aspects that’s good. As Lutherans we know what we believe and where we differ with other Christians and we can have informed theological discourse those outside of Lutheranism. Within our confession we can correct and admonish those straying into error. But still, it’s a shame that we can’t be a universal church in the unity St. Paul is calling for. If only all these folks would get with the program and become Lutherans, right?

I actually do mean that. But that attitude also may indicate that we aren’t seeing the situation rightly—that we are seeing the worldly divisions, but maybe not the divine unity that exists.

*“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* This is baptismal language. Paul is appealing to believers on the basis of the name into whom they are baptized. And in that name we find unity that transcends denominational lines.

Do not get me wrong here. The Bible is very clear that doctrinal error is a big deal, so I am by no means excusing the theological errors out there as if they don't matter. But the invisible church is all baptized believers, even those who adhere to errors that do not void the Gospel. I'm not sure if it's arrogance or tribalism or fear or what, but we sinners have this tendency to think in an "us and them" manner when we should be thinking in an "all one in Christ" way. And I'm kind of ashamed to say that sometimes pastors are the worst at this.

But we've all heard Christ's call, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" We all know He is the King, our King, because He has purchased us from the kingdom of sin, death and the devil by His blood. If we let that Gospel have its way among us, then we know that we stand first and foremost united in the love of Christ, and the differences take second place.

In Corinth, somehow the divisions had become the priority within the church. St. Paul rather sarcastically spells out that Christ is our point of unity, into whom we all stand baptized, and Christ is always first and foremost. St. Paul urges the believers to start with Christ, and then in that unity to find the same mind and judgment.

This sermon likely isn't hitting the mark for all of you. I know some of y'all simply don't care too much about the doctrinal differences. I think that's a shame because the true doctrine of Lutheranism is the free Gospel all and only in the merit of Christ and, believe it or not, that is a rare thing out there in the church and robs a lot of our brothers and sisters of the comfort of certain salvation. But, knowing that we are all united in Christ and called on by Christ to build each other up and admonish one another from error, be eager to embrace our brothers and sisters in love and share what we know to be true. We want to let the Gospel have its way with us and, through us, have its way with our brothers and sisters in Christ of every denomination.

These divisions St. Paul is writing against is a rather tough topic. It goes in a lot of directions and applies to a lot of issues in this rather long epistle. But one thing is quite clear: when it comes to Jesus, diversity is not our strength. There is only one Jesus.

There is only one human being who kept God's holy law perfectly: It is Jesus.

There is only one perfect sacrifice for all the world's sin: It is Jesus.

There is only one Savior through whose sacrifice your sins stand forgiven: It is Jesus.

There is only one resurrection from death to perfect, eternal life that is the firstfruits of that same resurrection for all who believe: it is Jesus's.

There is only one baptism unto this eternal salvation: It is the baptism into Jesus.

Jesus is our strength; Jesus is our victory.

The diversity that comes into this equation is only that sinners find all sorts of diverse ways to mess with this wonderful Gospel. Any yet, Jesus baptizes us into the Gospel nonetheless. Despite ourselves and our fallen diversity of faith, we have divine unity in Christ simply because He forgives our many faults.

So let's not glory in the divisions. Let's not get too full of ourselves because we possess the right Lutheran doctrine. Let's not stand in judgment over the Catholics, Pentecostals, and Christians of other stripes. I'll be the first one to say they're wrong about stuff, but they do call on the name of Jesus—the same Jesus you and I call on. They're brothers and sisters, gathered together in Christ's arms.

Know that there is unity in the love of Christ. Let's always start right there under His grace, and then, in that love, confront the diversity that cannot keep us apart.

Amen.