

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 13  
Year B

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15  
Psalm 78:23-29  
Ephesians 4:1-16  
John 6:24-35

To say we live in a divided world might be an understatement. We are in the midst of an election year and the primary election is this Tuesday. We have been inundated with political ads on television and a constant barrage on our phones in the form of text messages, robo-calls, and emails. Every candidate and political party is telling how bad the opposition is and, sometimes actually telling us something positive about their own candidate. There is a constant noise of us against them - Democrat against Republican, liberal against conservative, left against right, who is more conservative or more progressive than the next person. We also see this on the international stage. Whether it is political, ideological, or athletic, we are in competition with "the other." Sadly, this is nothing new.

Paul writes extensively about how, in Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, free or slave, rich or poor, and the list goes on. In his day, being a citizen of Rome had its perks, while being true to one's own nationality or clan was equally important. Paul also wrote about divisions in the church - are you of Apollos, Cephas, or Paul?

In the first three chapters of the letter to the Ephesians, we read about all that Christ did for the church and how we need to reconnect with all in the world, divided as it is. Whenever a passage begins with "therefore," we need to pay attention to what follows. Here, we read of how we are bound together by the high standards of individual and corporate morality. Here, we are faced with the oneness of God.

In a letter that was meant to be circulated among many towns and congregations, we see the word "one" used seven times in two verses. In a world of division, we need this reminder of the oneness in Christ. However, in the midst of this oneness, we are also reminded that God pours out many gifts through the Holy Spirit. These gifts, though varied, have a single purpose - the building up of the church. As humans, we try to prioritize these gifts making some more prestigious or more desirable, while Paul says they are all equally necessary in the church. Just because some of these gifts require us to stand up in front of the group while others might be more in the background does not make any more important than the others. We might go back to Paul's analogy of the body - some members might appear to be more important, but the body cannot function properly without all members working together.

What does this mean to us today in this divided world? I believe the church must lead by example. For over a thousand years, the church has been at odds with itself - one group engaging in war against another group. Throughout the history of the church, even from the first and second centuries, members of the church have been battling against each other - in the name of the church. This is exactly what Paul is railing against in this letter, as well as in several others. If

the Body of Christ can't get along with other members of the body, how can we expect those around us to get along? I have said it many times before - just because we may worship differently doesn't mean one group is right and the other group is wrong. We don't all drive the same type of vehicles - why should we expect everyone to want to worship the same way? What is important is not how we interpret God's Word, but how we follow the basic command of Jesus - to love one another.

If the church, if individual Christians, can't show love for one another, we have no business calling ourselves Christians. Paul tells us that we are to bear with one another in love. We are to put up with one another's differences in love. In a word, Paul is telling us to "grow up", as one commentator puts it, and focus on "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." As the Gospel song says, "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord." We need to act like it!

Paul states it clearly, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you are called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." ONE! In heaven there are no Baptists or Presbyterians or Catholics or Episcopalians or Methodists. In heaven there are children of God. We are called to love all, no matter what their politics may be; no matter what their style of worship might be; no matter what they think of us. We are all one in Christ Jesus.