

FRANKLIN CONGREGATIONAL-CHRISTIAN CHURCH, UCC
Sermon For Sunday, January 26, 2025
I Corinthians 12: 12-31a

I'm so proud of you, of this church, where we've been and where we're going.

Many churches have divisions and differences within its congregation – and I'm aware there were those present in the past – and heaven forbid, they could happen in the future unless we all work to make sure they don't occur.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, even before it began to be called a Christian church, while the Jesus followers were still offshoots of Judaism, there were differences between the various sects. There were centers in Alexandria Egypt, Rome, Thesalonika, Galatia, Corinth to name a few. It wasn't until over 300 years after Jesus' death that the communities began to come together. There was rivalry between the communities – their thoughts and beliefs until the community at Rome became the strongest.

I wonder if God weeps when he sees how Christians have constantly failed to work through their divisions while holding on to love, compassion and kindness.

There is, a fundamental truth, however, that differences, even conflict can be a good thing if engaged properly. A basic law of the natural world is that differences actually lead to growth and life. In the human body, cells break away from one another and multiply and new life occurs. Friction is the resistance that objects experience when they rub against each other – yet the natural law of friction enables things to move and life to exist.

Part of the DNA of God's world is that conflict, differences and friction are not to be avoided by embraced and handled with understanding and sensitivity so new life can occur.

When Paul was writing his letter to the church at Corinth there was a lot of friction, a lot of difference, and they weren't handling it well. So Paul wrote to them to try to get them to understand that embracing difference would be the gateway to spiritual life, strength and growth.

Paul is considered the father of this emerging movement called Christianity – his task was to travel around the ancient world, set up churches and establish congregations wherever he went. If you were Paul, and you wanted to set up a new movement called The Church, and you were looking for a city in which to work, then Corinth would be first on your list.

Corinth was amazing, a new city built upon the ruins of an ancient place, it had a strong commercial center with market places drawing people from all over the Roman Empire – it could be a place where people could listen to Paul and others – hear the words that became the Gospels and head back to their villages and homes to start churches there too.

So Paul established a church in Corinth – while we want to think it was strong and successful – in reality it was deeply divided with arguments and divisions in the members that was ready to blow – when Paul wrote to them, it wasn't a happy church.

In the first chapter Paul wrote, “it has been reported to me that there are quarrels among you...each of you says, I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Peter or I belong to Christ...” the members were lining up behind various leaders. By the time of the

4th chapter Paul is writing that some have become arrogant... in chapter 5 not read today, there was sexual immorality occurring, but chapter 11 the Service of Communion had become a source of division as well – by the 15th chapter, false doctrines were being believed. O was this church ever in a bad place.

But Paul loved this church and he wasn't ready to give up on them – thus we have the two letters he wrote to the church in Corinth.

Paul didn't give up because he knew God wouldn't give up. God poured the Spirit into the congregation and each member had gifts to offer, a service to others, and ministry to undertake. Paul wanted to help them find their way with God so Corinth could become the church it had been destined to be in God.

Paul knew the church in Corinth had the potential to change and fulfill its destiny. He began with 3 points

1. They needed to realize the reality of their unity'
2. We are to embrace difference and diversity and see it as life giving, not life draining
3. We must again realize the church's calling.

1st: underneath the discord, there existed a unity that held them together and the members needed to rediscover their unity and work through their issues in a kindly, godly way. Unity was the bedrock of becoming the church God destined - unity in diversity.

Paul begins in chapter 12, "The body is one and has many members"... it's a simple spiritual law reflected in nature. Think of trees – the world is not made up solely of oak trees – there are a variety of trees that live together. Our world is incredibly diverse

with countless elements maintaining their sense of difference yet making a part of this world.

Paul says the same thing about the human body – each body is made up of different organs each with its own function – but because the ear is different from the foot which is different from the tongue, which is different from fingers, which is different from lungs – it doesn't mean there isn't unity – it just means that the unity embraces diversity and difference.

In our church there are differences – what we believe, our gifts, our talents, our thoughts about God and worship and Jesus – but our differences don't mean there can't be unity – and here I believe you do extremely well. We work together well, extremely well. We support one another through our trials and in our joys. We take new steps in unity.

Next week I will finish preaching on Unity in the church mentioned earlier –

- Embracing differences and diversity and see it as life giving
- Recognize again the calling of our church.

God has chosen us and gifted us to be God's representatives. We are stewards together of that calling. Thanks be to God. Amen.