

January 22, 2017 - Unity in Diversity

I Corinthians 1:10-18

How many of you watched President Trump's inauguration on Friday? I have to admit that I left the office for an hour that morning so I could watch the inauguration ceremony live on television. It felt like an historic moment that I didn't want to miss.

I hoped that we would see some sign of a change in the man and his message once Donald Trump was in office, but I was disappointed. Most new presidents take the opportunity of the inaugural address to express a wish for unity and a desire to work together across political parties for the sake of their country and their world. President Trump chose instead to give a "stump" speech pitting the U.S. against all other nations with the phrase, "America First" and pitting himself against all the other politicians, both Democrat and Republican, who sat behind him on the podium. When he used the word, "unity," it was to unite the people of America against what he called, "Islamic terrorism," or against the world in general. His speech was both defiant and divisive. The many protests that took place after his election and the protest marches that have taken place in the last few days illustrate the great fear and division that now exists in our neighbouring country and in our world.

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript.html?_r=0

This kind of division is not new and I'm sad to say that it can also be found in the Christian church. It happens within congregations, within denominations and especially between churches. Our own congregation is certainly familiar with the pain of conflict, our United Church of Canada has experienced turbulent times and all you have to do is look at the incredibly long list of congregations in this city in order to be aware of the divisions that can take place in the Christian church.

This was the first topic that Paul covered in his letter to the fledgling church in Corinth. He was concerned that the members of the church were quarreling amongst themselves and that they were beginning to divide into factions based on which apostle had baptized them. The letter does not make it clear what the actual issues were. All we know is that division was taking place and Paul was trying to nip it in the bud. He was doing that by pointing out that it doesn't matter who baptized you, what matters is the message of the Gospel, the message of Jesus, the message of the cross. And, as he points out in Chapter 13 of this same letter, that message is a message of hope, healing and transformation. It is a message of love.

Our moderator, The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell, has published a statement this week in response to what is happening in The United States of America and in the world. She gave her statement the provocative title, "I Love Donald Trump." I want to share with you a video where she responds to some questions

about her statement and explains why she feels it is so important at this point in history. <http://www.united-church.ca/news/moderator-i-love-donald-trump>

Yes, Jesus asked us to love our enemies (*see Matthew 5:44*). But what kind of love was he talking about, what kind of love was our Moderator talking about? It wasn't eros or romantic love, the kind of love that brings us to form relationships that lead to marriage. It wasn't philia, the kind of love we feel for family members or good friends. Jesus and Jordan were both talking about agape love. The essence of agape love is goodwill and benevolence. Agape is the love of the soul. Agape is the kind of love that recognizes the connection that we have with every human being on this earth. It is the kind of love that connects us all as children of God. It is the kind of love that connects us with all our Christian brothers and sisters as followers of Jesus the Christ.

We are called as Christians, as followers of Jesus, to love our enemies, to recognize all people on earth as beloved children of God.