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I find it to be funny—and also very ironic—that the selected readings for this Sunday happen to fall on the very day when we have our annual meetings. And not only us, but most Lutheran churches seem to traditionally choose the last Sunday in January for their meetings. So I take great comfort in the fact that I am not the only pastor standing uncomfortably in the pulpit today.

What to say about these texts on the very same Sundays when we discuss budgetary items, when we review the work of our elected committees and leaders, when we look back over this previous year and look ahead to the coming one? Truth be told, many of the very same things can be proclaimed today as Paul proclaimed almost 2000 years ago.

Paul is writing a letter to his beloved church-goers in the city of Corinth, a city which we learned about just last week. We soon discover we are not so very different from our first-century brothers and sisters. We're, in fact, more similar than we might realize.

It seems there is some unrest and discontent in the church in Corinth. It seems as though the congregation is divided. There appear to be perhaps four different camps into which the congregation is divided—1. there is the camp that claims to follow Paul, the founder of the church and author of this letter, 2. there is the camp that claims to follow Apollos, an eloquent and educated man from Alexandria, 3. there is a camp that claims to follow Cephas, also known as Simon Peter, the disciple whom Jesus himself chose to be the cornerstone of the church, 4. and then there are those who *get it*, who claim to follow Christ. After all, Paul clarifies, you are baptized *not* in the name of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, but you are baptized into the name of Christ. All of you. It is to Christ alone that you belong. *All of you*. It is Christ alone whom you are to follow. *All of you*. It is perhaps the only thing you hold in common, but it's a very important thing. *The most important thing*.

It is interesting when we consider that the early church wrestled with the very same things we wrestle with today. There are the same strong wills, strong minds, strong opinions in Paul's congregation in Corinth as there are in our two congregations in Calamus, or in any congregation where two or three are gathered together. The church has never been homogenous, not even way back in the very beginning. But Paul doesn't appeal to the Corinthians to be identical. He doesn't tell them they all have to think the same things or even have the same opinions on various religious issues.

But he does call upon them to be in agreement, to not become divided over these things, and to not fight. To remember what they hold in common as they express their differences.

And on many issues, the congregation in Corinth agrees to disagree as they journey together as a community. The congregation in Corinth had to figure out how to remain a community and still engage controversial issues such as sexual morality,

marriage, how to relate to non-Christians, questions of what it means to live a righteous life, questions on who is welcome to Holy Communion and who is not, questions of status and rank in the congregation, what to do with people who talk too much and too loudly during church, how to explain the resurrection of Jesus Christ in ways that people can understand and so on...sound familiar?

It should. It is Christian life together, then and now.

Sometimes it seems impossible to navigate through all of us—after all, it's hard enough to do in our very own families and relationships much less in a congregation. However, there is good news in this just in case you get the sense that there is no point in even trying to be the church, since it was a mess even in the very beginning...

Sometimes it seems like chaos does indeed rule the day. Or the month. Or the year. Sometimes it seems as though chaos is the prevailing force in the universe, that there is no hope for order and peace and calm. Doug and I were talking to Duane Priebe about this very same thing just this week up at seminary. And Duane made the brilliant point that even in the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis, we are inclined to think that in the beginning, there was chaos. And then God entered into the picture and ordered that chaos by calling for light and land and life.

But to think this way presupposes that there was a rival, chaotic force in the universe before God. And this simply cannot be, if God has always existed. The comfort in this is that somehow God was around even before Genesis, even before the raging waters of chaos which is where the book of Genesis begins. God doesn't begin when Genesis begins, with the chaos of pre-creation. God came before the raging waters of chaos. And God will remain when that chaos subsides, when the waters calm, when peace settles. ***God remains steadfast, as the raging storms of chaos ebb and flow.***

This is true in creation, and it is true in our lives and it is true in the church, which does not belong to us anymore than anything else in creation belongs to us. It all belongs to God, just as we do. All things are just ours to take care of for a while until either we die or Christ returns, whichever comes first.

And so let us take care in our taking care of this church, to remember that there has been chaos in the church since its conception, but it is not a chaos that is out of God's control, and it is not a chaos that God cannot settle. God's word of peace has the power to settle raging forces of chaos, wherever and whenever they might be.

If God can bring order to the primordial chaos by creating light and land and life...if God can bring salvation and grace through the cross of Christ to a chaotic and broken world...then God can certainly handle a handful of Norwegians and Germans. We might be stubborn, but we're certainly not the toughest challenge God has ever had.

We give God thanks for our brothers and sisters in Corinth, fellow Christians who battled chaos and encountered challenges just as we do today; we give God thanks for Paul and Apollos and Cephas, for speaking God's word of grace to clashing and headstrong congregations; but mostly we give God thanks for his son Jesus Christ, in whose name we all have been baptized, whose forgiveness and mercy we receive in common, who is Alpha and Omega—before chaos and after—whose voice commands

the raging storms to be still, and they are still, and we welcome his proclamation of peace today, just as the Corinthians did long ago.