

Sermon: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 (Epiphany 3A)
Christ Church Riverdale, 27 January 2008 (Sunday of Annual Parish Meeting)
The Rev. Robert C. Lamborn, Rector

^{NRS} **1 Corinthians 1:10** Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

George Whitefield was an Anglican priest in the 1700s, very well-known and popular both in Britain and the American colonies. Whitefield was an evangelical, a part of the Methodist movement before methodism broke off and formed its own denomination in the 1780s. Whitefield was known principally for being a gifted preacher. He held open-air evangelical meetings attended by thousands; these meetings so popular in part because they weren't competing with sports and cable TV and the internet and iPods and a million other things that fill people's time today. Whitefield was such a marvelous public speaker, he had such a beautiful and resonant and musical voice, that it was joked that people would commit to follow Jesus just from listening to the way he said, "Mesopotamia."

We heard just the opposite idea this morning from the Apostle Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power." "So that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power." Paul doesn't want people to be attracted to his *voice*; he wants people to be attracted to his *message*. He doesn't want people to be attracted to the packaging, but to the contents. He doesn't want things to be too easy. Maybe he was remembering that in the history of God's people when things get too easy, folks can start thinking they can rely on their own strength and forget they need to rely on God.

2007 was not a year when people had things so easy that they believed that they could rely on their own strength. Our country remains at war, with all its consequences. Terrorism continues to cause fear, an economic recession is possible. It is abundantly true in the world and in our nation that things are not so easy that we can rely on our own strength, and this has also been true in the life of Christ Church.

Last year was a tough one for us financially, chiefly because of the performance of our investments. The 2008 budget has been trimmed in just about every way possible without adversely affecting ministry. You might say, “We’re as non-profit as we want to be,” or in other words, we’re in no danger of being so flush with cash that out of ease we believe we can rely on our own strength and empty the cross of Christ of its power. There are two things I want to say about this financial situation; one is to put it into perspective. When you think about the hundreds of millions of our sister and brother Christians in different countries across the globe, it is safe to say that Christ Church is one of the richest congregations in the whole world—and our human resources surpass our financial resources! We have been greatly blessed, and we have much to be thankful for. The other is to say that for me, the process of working hard to bring the 2008 budget closer to balance has been not depressing, but energizing. Our vision should always exceed our budget, if it didn’t, we’d be stagnating! It is energizing to be faced with challenges and to know that God will provide the resources to meet them when our resources are stewarded prayerfully and combined with our best efforts.

The city of Corinth was diverse, cosmopolitan, sophisticated--in that way a lot like New York City and Riverdale. And Paul has written to the Christians in Corinth not only of the power of the cross of Christ, but to avoid divisions in the congregation—Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ.

Instead he calls on them to be in agreement, united in the same mind and purpose. Now this is not to say that Paul was trying to eradicate diversity—elsewhere he writes glowingly about the variety of gifts God gives us and the Body of Christ having different members or parts. The shining examples of this we have here at Christ Church are the International Dinner and the Pentecost service where we use different languages. Paul is looking not for lockstep conformity or uniformity but instead what I would call a convergence on Christ. Each of us comes from a different place—background, experiences, convictions and the closer we get to Jesus the closer we get to each other.

Our ministry doesn’t consist in how well we say “Mesopotamia,” or in the size of our budget revenue--not in how successful we are by worldly standards, but in how faithfully we walk the way of the Cross, which will not be emptied of its power. By God’s grace we walk that way together, in the process of becoming something new, and it takes faith to trust that the new reality will come. This becoming new is resurrection, triumph over the forces of death which is the only thing that makes sense out of having a central tenet of our Christian faith be a symbol of deliberately cruel execution. By God’s grace we live the process of becoming who God calls us to be *together*--together as people who seek to converge on Jesus Christ, as a people whose common life is oriented to the Cross of Jesus Christ and its saving power.