

I Corinthians 1:10-17
January 22, '17

“BE LONGING”

**AT THE END OF AN OLD BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
SONG, HE SINGS, “*YEAH, JUST SITTING BACK TRYING TO
RECAPTURE A LITTLE BIT OF THE GLORY OF...WELL,
TIME SLIPS AWAY & LEAVES YOU WITH NOTHING,
MISTER, BUT BORING STORIES OF GLORY DAYS.*”**

**IT’S A HAUNTING SONG FOR ALL OF US AND THE
OLDER WE GET, THE MORE HAUNTING IT BECOMES.**

**WE ALL SUFFER FROM IT, THOUGH, DON’T WE –
TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER?**

WE ALL HAVE “GLORY DAYS” SYNDROME.

**WE LONG FOR WHAT WE LIKE TO REFER TO AS
“THE GOOD OLD DAYS.”**

**“*THOSE WERE THE DAYS*” AS EDITH BUNKER
SANG.**

BUT WERE THEY REALLY?

WERE THEY REALLY “THE GOOD OLD DAYS?”

BILLY JOEL OPENS HIS SONG “KEEPIN’ THE FAITH” BY SAYING, “*THE GOOD OLD DAYS WEREN’T ALWAYS SO GOOD...*”

THERE’S A WORD FOR THIS WHOLE IDEA – SAUDADE.

IT’S A DIFFICULT-TO-TRANSLATE PORTUGUESE WORD THAT BASICALLY MEANS “*LONGING FOR A PAST THAT NEVER WAS.*”

WHEN WE THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE PAST, WE KNOW THAT’S TRUE.

THERE’S ANOTHER OLD SONG CALLED “SWEETER MEMORIES” THAT POINTS THIS OUT WITH THE LYRIC “*TAKE THE GOOD, LEAVE THE BAD – TAKE A FEW OF THESE – THE SWEETER MEMORIES.*”

**THAT'S WHAT WE TEND TO DO WITH THE PAST,
ISN'T IT?**

**WE FILTER IT THROUGH OUR OWN HEART &
MIND AND MAKE THINGS OF THE PAST THE WAY WE
WANT THEM TO BE OR THE WAY WE *WISH* THEY HAD
BEEN.**

**WHEN WE THINK OF THE PAST AS "*THE GOOD
OLD DAYS*" WE FORGET SOME THINGS, DON'T WE?**

**WHEN WE THINK THINGS WERE SO MUCH
BETTER "BACK THEN," WE FORGET ABOUT
SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS AIR CONDITIONING.**

**DO YOU REALLY WANT TO GO BACK TO "THE
GOOD OLD DAYS," EXPERIENCING A HOT & HUMID
EVANSVILLE SUMMER WITHOUT AIR
CONDITIONING?**

**AND THEN THERE ARE THINGS FAR MORE
IMPORTANT.**

**DO YOU REALLY WANT TO GO BACK TO “THE
GOOD OLD DAYS” OF MEDICAL & DENTAL
TREATMENT WITHOUT MODERN ADVANCES OF THE
PAST FEW DECADES?**

**ALL IT TAKES TO BRING YOU BACK TO REALITY
WITH REGARD TO THE LONGING YOU EXPERIENCE
FOR “THE GOOD OLD DAYS” IS A CONVERSATION
WITH SOMEONE FROM A PREVIOUS GENERATION
TELLING YOU HOW THINGS REALLY WERE IN THOSE
“GOOD OLD DAYS!”**

**SO OFTEN WE’RE LONGING FOR THE WRONG
THING.**

**WE SHOULD BE LONGING – NOT FOR A PAST
THAT NEVER WAS – BUT RATHER FOR A FUTURE**

**THAT IS YET TO BE – A FUTURE THAT WE CAN HELP
CREATE.**

**I THINK OF ALL THIS AS I READ THIS PASSAGE
FROM PAUL’S FIRST LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN
THE CITY OF CORINTH.**

**I THINK OF THE NUMBER OF TIMES I’VE HEARD
PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE CHURCH & EXPRESS A
LONGING FOR US TO GET BACK TO THE WAY THE
CHURCH USED TO BE.**

**THEY WANT TO GET BACK TO THE ORIGINAL
CHURCH – THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.**

**THEY ACT AS IF THOSE “GLORY DAYS” OF THE
CHURCH WERE PROBLEM-FREE.**

**THEY THINK THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST
CENTURY WAS SOME KIND OF UTOPIAN EXISTENCE.**

**EVEN A CURSORY GLANCE AT THE NEW
TESTAMENT CAN REVEAL THE FOLLY OF SUCH
THINKING!**

**THE CHURCH IN ITS INFANCY WAS ANYTHING
BUT PROBLEM-FREE!**

**THROUGHOUT THIS LETTER, PAUL DEALS WITH
ONE PROBLEM AFTER ANOTHER AND THE FIRST
ONE HE ADDRESSES IS DIVISIONS.**

**HE KNOWS THERE ARE A VARIETY OF ISSUES &
PROBLEMS TO BE CORRECTED, BUT IF THIS ONE
ISN'T FIXED, HE CAN'T POSSIBLY HOPE TO FIX ANY
OF THE OTHERS.**

**WHAT PAUL LONGS FOR IN THE CHURCH IS
UNITY – AN END TO THE BICKERING & SQUABBLING
& QUARRELING & ARGUING BETWEEN VARIOUS**

**FACTIONS THAT HAVE EMERGED AMONG THESE
CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS.**

**OBVIOUSLY THE SAME LONGING EXISTS IN A
VARIETY OF OTHER AREAS OF LIFE & SOCIETY.**

**IT'S CERTAINLY AN APPROPRIATE TOPIC FOR US
TO CONSIDER AT THIS VERY TIME IN THE LIFE OF
OUR NATION.**

**AND SOME OF WHAT PAUL SUGGESTS HERE CAN
PERHAPS APPLY TO THOSE OTHER AREAS, BUT HE'S
PRIMARILY ADDRESSING THE KIND OF
DIVISIVENESS THAT HE SEES WITHIN THE
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.**

**IT'S INTERESTING HOW THIS HAS COME TO HIS
ATTENTION.**

**IT'S FROM – AS HE TELLS US – “CHLOE’S
PEOPLE.”**

WE DON'T KNOW WHO THOSE PEOPLE ARE BUT THERE ARE SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT HERE, THOUGH, IS WHAT "CHLOE'S PEOPLE" TELL PAUL.

THEY TELL HIM OF AT LEAST FOUR DIFFERENT GROUPS.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO CLAIM THEY "BELONG" TO EITHER PAUL, APOLLOS, PETER OR CHRIST.

IF WE GET INTO THE DETAILS, WE COULD PROBABLY DETERMINE WHAT DIFFERENTIATED ONE GROUP FROM ANOTHER – AT LEAST WITH THE FIRST THREE.

THEY HAD, FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, ALIGNED THEMSELVES PRIMARILY WITH THE STYLE OR THE PARTICULAR THEOLOGICAL

LEANING OF ONE OF THESE LEADERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

IT'S THE FOURTH ONE, THOUGH, THAT MIGHT TRIP US UP.

THERE WAS A GROUP WHO SAID, "*I BELONG TO CHRIST.*"

AT FIRST GLANCE, WE MIGHT BE INCLINED TO SAY, "*WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT!? ISN'T THAT WHAT THE OTHER THREE GROUPS SHOULD HAVE BEEN SAYING? SHOULDN'T THEY ALL HAVE BEEN SAYING 'I BELONG TO CHRIST' RATHER THAN SOME FALLIBLE, EARTHLY LEADER?*"

ON THE SURFACE, YES.

BUT I THINK PAUL'S INCLUSION OF THIS GROUP AS ONE TO BE ADMONISHED, TELLS US A GREAT DEAL.

**FOR ONE THING, THOSE IN EACH GROUP -
INCLUDING THE LAST ONE - WERE REALLY
EMPHASIZING THE FIRST WORD OF THAT PHRASE “I
BELONG...”**

**THE EMPHASIS WAS ON “I.”
IN ESSENCE, THEY WERE BEING ARROGANT IN
THEIR ATTITUDES.**

“I” HAVE THE RIGHT ANSWER.

“I” KNOW WHAT’S PROPER.

**“I” KNOW HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD REALLY
FUNCTION.**

“I” AM A BIT MORE HOLY THAN “THOU.”

**BASICALLY, WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A PRIME
EXAMPLE OF WHAT I WOULD SUGGEST IS NEARLY
ALWAYS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH &
IN MOST OTHER AREAS OF SOCIETY AS WELL.**

**IT'S THAT LITTLE DEVIOUS THREE-LETTER
WORD, "EGO."**

IT'S PRIDE & ARROGANCE.

**IT'S THINKING MY WAY IS THE ONLY RIGHT
WAY TO THINK OR THE ONLY CORRECT WAY TO DO
SOMETHING.**

**IT'S A HUNGER FOR POWER & A THIRST FOR
CONTROL.**

**THAT'S WHY THIS LAST PARTY IS THE MOST
DANGEROUS.**

**YES, ON THE SURFACE, IT WOULD SEEM AS
THOUGH THIS WAS THE ONE & ONLY GROUP THAT
GOT IT RIGHT.**

BUT WHAT THEY'RE REALLY SAYING IS:

***"OTHERS MAY SAY 'I BELONG TO PAUL' OR 'I
BELONG TO APOLLOS' OR 'I BELONG TO PETER,' BUT I***

***SAY ‘I BELONG TO CHRIST.’ MY WAY OF
UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL IS THE WAY THE
GOSPEL SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD.”***

**I PASSED A BILLBOARD ON I-69 THE OTHER DAY
THAT SERVES AS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THIS.**

**IT READS, “*REAL* (WITH ‘REAL’ UNDERLINED) –
“*REAL CHRISTIANS OBEY JESUS’ TEACHINGS.*”**

**HOW ARE YOU GOING TO ARGUE WITH THAT
STATEMENT?!**

**OF COURSE REAL CHRISTIANS OBEY JESUS’
TEACHINGS!**

**BUT YOU KNOW THERE’S A DEEPER MESSAGE
MEANT TO BE CONVEYED.**

**I’M NOT SURE WHAT THAT MESSAGE IS, BUT I’M
FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT IF BILLBOARDS HAD
EXISTED IN FIRST CENTURY CORINTH, THOSE OF**

**THE “*I BELONG TO CHRIST*” PARTY WOULD HAVE
ERECTED ONE BEARING THOSE WORDS!**

**THE CHURCH, AT ITS WORST, FOCUSES ON
MINOR ISSUES THAT CAUSE MAJOR DIVISIONS.**

**THE CHURCH, AT ITS BEST, LOOKS BEYOND
THOSE ISSUES TO CENTER ITS FOCUS ON CHRIST &
HIS MEANING FOR OUR LIVES AND OUR CALL TO
SERVE HIM IN THE WORLD.**

**UNFORTUNATELY, THAT ISN’T WHAT THE
WORLD SO OFTEN SEES WHEN IT LOOKS AT THE
CHURCH.**

**WE CAN SEE THE DIFFICULTIES THE CHURCH
HAS ALWAYS EXPERIENCED WHEN WE READ THIS
PASSAGE FROM I CORINTHIANS.**

**BUT THE EARLY CHURCH ALSO PRESENTED A
DIFFERENT SIDE FROM THIS ONE.**

**ONE OF THE EARLY CHURCH LEADERS,
TERTULLIAN, WROTE THAT THE CHRISTIANS' DEEDS
OF LOVE & MERCY WERE SO NOBLE THAT THE
PAGAN WORLD CONFESSED IN ASTONISHMENT –
*“SEE HOW THESE CHRISTIANS LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”***

**AND IT WASN'T JUST “ONE ANOTHER” THE
WORLD SAW THE CHRISTIANS LOVING.**

**AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS TERTULLIAN, A
STAUNCH OPPONENT OF CHRISTIANITY ADMITTED
IN BEWILDERMENT, *“THEY FEED NOT ONLY THEIR
OWN POOR, BUT OURS AS WELL!”***

**WE SHOULD ALL BE LONGING TO BELONG TO A
GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE PERCEIVED BY THE
WORLD IN THAT WAY.**

**GOING BACK TO SOMETHING I SAID EARLIER –
WE SHOULD BE LONGING FOR A FUTURE THAT IS
YET TO BE – A FUTURE WE CAN HELP CREATE.**

**THAT’S WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN OUR FOCUS
SHIFTS AWAY FROM THOSE THINGS WHICH MIGHT
SEEK TO DIVIDE US & FOCUS ON THAT CALL FROM
CHRIST TO SERVE OTHERS THAT UNITES US.**

**I READ A STORY THE OTHER DAY ABOUT AN
EXTREMELY WEALTHY WOMAN WHO POSSESSED
GREAT TREASURES OF ART.**

**THE WOMAN HAD JUST ONE SON WHOM SHE
LOVED DEARLY.**

**THE BOY TRAGICALLY DIED WHEN HE WAS
ONLY IN HIS TEENAGE YEARS.**

**THE MOTHER, HAVING LOVED HER SON SO
DEEPLY, GRIEVED SO MUCH OVER HIS DEATH THAT**

**SHE DIED OF A BROKEN HEART ONLY A FEW WEEKS
LATER.**

**THE MOTHER HAD MADE OUT A WILL FOR HER
ESTATE AND IN THAT WILL, IT SAID THAT
EVERYTHING WOULD BE SOLD AT AUCTION.**

THERE WAS NOTHING UNUSAL ABOUT THAT.

**BUT WHAT WAS STRANGE, IS THAT THE MOTHER
STIPULATED THAT AN OIL PAINTING OF HER SON
WAS TO BE THE FIRST ITEM OFFERED BY THE
AUCTIONEER.**

**LARGE CROWDS GATHERED ON THE DAY OF
THE AUCTION TO BID ON THIS MAGNIFICENT
COLLECTION OF ART.**

**IN KEEPING WITH THE PROVISION OF THE WILL,
THE BOY'S PORTRAIT WAS FIRST HELD UP FOR BIDS.**

**TRUTH BE TOLD - NO ONE THERE CARED ABOUT
THE DECEASED BOY'S PORTRAIT.**

NO ONE SAW ANY VALUE IN IT AT ALL.

**NO ONE, THAT IS, UNTIL AN OLD SERVANT, WHO
HAD ALWAYS LOVED THE BOY, PLACED A ONE
DOLLAR BID FOR HIS PORTRAIT.**

**THE AUCTIONEER, IN DRAMATIC FASHION,
CALLED OUT, "*GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE, SOLD FOR
ONE DOLLAR.*"**

**BUT THEN THE AUCTIONEER DID SOMETHING
COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED.**

**HE STOPPED THE AUCTION AND ANNOUNCED
THAT NO MORE ART WAS TO BE SOLD.**

THE AUCTION WAS OVER.

THE PEOPLE IN THE CROWD WERE STUNNED.

***“WHAT DO YOU MEAN ‘IT’S OVER!?’ WE CAME TO
BID ON ALL OF THIS MAGNIFICENT ART WORTH
THOUSANDS & THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS!”***

***THE AUCTIONEER CALMED EVERYONE DOWN &
SAID, “I STOPPED THE SELLING, BECAUSE IN HER
WILL, THE MOTHER HAD NOT ONLY STIPULATED THAT
THE OIL PAINTING OF HER SON WAS TO BE THE FIRST
ITEM OFFERED...IT FURTHER STIPULATED THAT
ANYONE WHO LOVED HER SON ENOUGH TO BUY HIS
PORTRAIT SHOULD RECEIVE EVERYTHING IN THE
MOTHER’S HOUSE.”***

***I THINK THAT’S THE MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE
& THAT’S THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL.***

***IT’S ABOUT LOVING GOD’S SON ENOUGH TO
TRULY RECEIVE HIM & WHEN YOU RECEIVE HIM,
YOU GET EVERYTHING ELSE AS WELL.***

**WE SHOULD BE LONGING TO BELONG TO A
GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO WANT NOTHING MORE
THAN TO SERVE CHRIST BY SERVING OTHERS.**

**WE SHOULD BE LONGING TO PUT PETTY
DIFFERENCES ASIDE IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.**

**WE SHOULD BE LONGING TO CREATE A BETTER
TOMORROW THROUGH DEEDS OF LOVE & KINDNESS
THAT WE OFFER TODAY.**

**WE SHOULD BE LONGING TO CAST ASIDE OUR
DIVISIONS & UNITE TOGETHER TO MAKE THE
WORLD – ONCE AGAIN, SAY, “*SEE HOW THESE
CHRISTIANS LOVE – NOT JUST ONE ANOTHER – BUT
SEE HOW THEY LOVE EVERYONE AROUND THEM.*”**

**DEEP INSIDE, AREN'T YOU LONGING TO BELONG
TO A GROUP OF WHOM SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD
BE MADE?**

**LET'S NOT JUST BE LONGING FOR IT – LET'S
WORK TOGETHER TO ENABLE US ALL TO BELONG
TO SUCH A GROUP – A GROUP SO COMMITTED TO
SERVING JESUS CHRIST THAT OTHERS WILL KNOW
WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE. AMEN.**

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