I Corinthians 1:10-17
January 22, ‘17

“BE LONGING”

AT THE END OF AN OLD BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
SONG, HE SINGS, “YEAH, JUST SITTIN’ BACK TRYIN’ 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.

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 CONFERRED 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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