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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Third Sunday after the Epiphany
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Lectionary Year A: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

As the L.A. race riots were raging in 1993, a man by the name of Rodney King uttered on videotape before the entire nation these now-famous words: "People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along? Can we get along?" Those of my generation or older likely have a vivid recollection of this desperate plea, and Rodney King from that point forward was a lifetime member of the fifteen-minutes-of-fame fraternity.

I think about Rodney King's plea as we look again to our text from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We hear Paul making a very similar appeal, so it seems -- that he wants the Corinthians to be "united in the same mind and the same purpose." Is it Rodney King saying "Can we get along?"

Certainly, as we think about the state of our world and especially the state of our country, this question comes back to us again and again. Paul, nearly two millennia ago, may have asked himself a similar question. What is happening here in the city of Corinth is something that he is rather upset about. The issue at hand is division, and the Corinthians themselves have lost sight of the things that they are grounded in -- Baptism and the cross of Christ.

It's not a matter of loyalty, it's not a matter of allegiances, it's not a matter of identity apart from Baptism and the cross of Christ; rather, that's the identity that all people in Corinth and we as Christians have in common.

I was thinking back the other day about something that helped me remind myself of

my grounding in Baptism -- namely, my baptismal anniversary. On January 20, 1974, I was baptized into the Christian faith. And as you think about what Baptism means to you, it might be a fine idea for you to do the same. Now, it may take a little bit of research -- it may take a little bit of digging -- but I'm sure somewhere you can find a certificate or look in the parish register and see what your baptismal anniversary is.

And it's kind of cool when you think about it. I didn't know what mine was until I was preparing to go to seminary, and, of course, when you apply to go to seminary and work with the Bishop and the appropriate committee, you have to have all this data handy -- for example, the baptismal anniversary (for me, January 20), and the date of Confirmation, which, in my case, was October 29, 1989.

As you think about what it means to be a baptized child of God, you can think back to these particular dates -- these particular milestones of your faith -- and remind yourself of the identity that you share with all Christians as you are baptized into Christ. Baptismal anniversaries are a wonderful way to do that, as I mentioned.

I had a seminary professor who said "you can remember your Baptism in the shower," because the water is coming down upon you maybe not quite in the same way as it was sprinkled on you at your Baptism, and yet the element -- the water -- is the same.

Here, Paul gets back to the matter of Baptism quite eloquently, I believe; he says that he is actually a preacher, not a baptizer. But this does not mean that Baptism is unimportant; rather, it means that people need to remember that it is Christ who unites them and there is no room for particular loyalties to particu-

lar people. And he names a couple of them; he says, "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.' Has Christ been divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13a). In that light, the thing to remember is that you are baptized into Christ, which is more important than who baptized you. Our Baptism is our source of unity in Christ, which then diverts us away from our divisions.

Divisions are what Paul is trying to address here, but divisions are not new to our situation right now in the United States. They go all the way back to this tiny community of believers in the ancient Greek city of Corinth...and farther. And these divisions are something that Paul wants people to rid themselves of. As we look to Baptism and as we look to the cross of Christ, we see the power that can unite us regardless of our identification or of our race, color, creed, or gender.

Yes, Corinth was a divided community, but it was very small -- so now let's translate our text into the current context, the United States. The United States, by comparison, is monstrous. And, of course, many of us may be looking at this time in our nation's history for ways to heal our divisions. We know that the atmosphere out there remains toxic, and we have people arguing with each other instead of conversing with each other.

As a matter of fact, I think a lot of the art of conversation is getting to be a lost art, because instead of sitting down at a table across from somebody and having a civil discussion, it has become much easier to take soapboxes to whatever public square and stand on them and shout. That is not an invitation to conversation.

And, of course, what has fueled this phenomenon is social media. I myself am a user of social media, but I have been known to take the occasional fast from it (the last ones being in 2017 and 2022), and that in itself can be quite healing. In the larger picture, we can think about how we interact with others and then see all the ways in which we are perpetuating the divisions among ourselves. What would the apostle Paul have to say about that?

We in our own little way, however, can be antidotes to this problem. We can help heal our divisions. We need to be an example to the world, for sure. And, for that, we need to look to our common identity as baptized children of God -- that, as we gather here, we check our divisions at the door. We realize that our Baptism into Christ levels the playing field completely.

In this place, we identify chiefly as "baptized into Christ," and all other identifications are of a secondary priority!

If you're familiar with the term "identity politics," you'll notice that it's an easy term to throw around when one wants to pigeonhole someone into a particular corner of the political landscape. (The degree to which people pigeonhole themselves may be related.) Among the things that perpetuate our divisions would be identity politics -- saying that what I believe in and what I stand for and the little niche that I occupy is now more important than being a citizen of our country and being a member of Christ's Church. All of that has overshadowed and took over our public discourse, right down to flame wars on social media.

Now, how do we become a part of the change?

Well, I think Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians makes that pretty clear. He says that we are to be "in the same mind and the same purpose" -- that

there be no divisions among us, that we look to the common identity that we all share as baptized children of God, and let that be the ground of our life together. You can think of all sorts of ways in which you can identify yourself, but really what's most important for Christians is that we identify ourselves as baptized children of God -- given God's grace to be a witness to the world, one that says something a little different from what you hear all the time everywhere else.

We know that God's grace has been so abundantly poured out upon us that there is no other way that we can go except be a healing and reconciling presence to those we encounter in our daily lives and in the wider world. As God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to heal the wound of sin between humanity and God, so too do we go out into the world -- having received that reconciliation -- to be the healing presence and light of God wherever we go.

That's what it means to live out your Baptism -- that you, being claimed by God through Holy Baptism, are formed into a follower of Christ and disciple to the world. There is something that you have been given -- something so tangible as the water in the shower splashing on your face -- that something being the water making you one with Christ. And, in remembering your Baptism, you know who you belong to and what is expected of you...that you be the healing and reconciling presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

So, getting back to Rodney King's question -- Can we get along? -- sure! But we need Christ to point the way. We need to remember that he came to heal our divisions, that he came to mend that great wound of sin, and, most of all, to give us eternal life to share with a very, very needy world.

Christ will point the way. We need him to point the way. There is no other way as far as we're concerned. And in order to make this world a little more harmonious, we need to remember what it means to be a baptized child of God -- that we have received something so great and so powerful...the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. Right there is the key to being the change that our world so desperately needs.

Amen.