

The reading from Matthew ends appropriately for today's gathering: "where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them." Thank you for being here this morning. There are about 20 of us. It is enough.

That's my only reference to Matthew today; I'll be talking—briefly—about Corinth and the Corinthians who lived there, and Paul, who tried to bring them to Christ...to bring Christ to them.

Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in 50 CE--of the common era—nearly 2,000 years ago. That letter was lost, but another letter he wrote about a year later is what we now call First Corinthians. Our reading from Corinthians today (that Bardin read to us) represents only a few verses from a very long letter. And, as with all attempts to quote scripture, it can be very misleading to try to glean universal truths from a handful of words. What we have in today's reading is a "handful of words" that are part of a much broader message from Paul. Today's lesson begins and ends with what I think IS that broader message: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." What follows is some mention of sacrifice by pagans for idols and demons—all real and present concerns of the people of Corinth—that I'm not even going to try to equate with modern issues (that's somebody else's sermon). The reading ends with "Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other," another, more

universal truth we can know and understand and embrace. First Corinthians is full of these truths, the most popular one found in the 13th chapter:

Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

.....

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

Throughout 1st Corinthians, Paul addresses the issues of his day, from divorce to prostitution to lawsuits to partisanship to worship –all, still issues for Christians.

Repeatedly, though, he pleads with the people of Corinth to simply be kind to one

another, to work toward unity: In Ch. 1, he asks that his brothers and sisters be

free of divisions and to be of “one mind and thought.” From Ch. 4, which we read

a few weeks ago, he writes: “When reviled, ...bless; when persecuted, ...endure,

when slandered,speak kindly.” And from today’s reading, again: “we who are

many are one body.”

We at Calvary know much about division. More importantly, though, we know

about unity, about kindness, about being of “one body.” We have that here, in this

beautiful space, mostly. When we’re at our best, we practice kindness and

compassion; we listen to one another; we pray for one another; and we’re really

good at it! Outside of this space, though, there is much division; there’s even

slander and persecution....and anger....and fear. Mostly fear. So each week, we return to this space, to pray some more, for kindness, compassion, love; we pray for one another. Hopefully, those prayers become actions outside of this space. My hope for us all, in the coming days and weeks, is that we'll remember—and share—the unity, the kindness, the sense of being “one body in Christ” that we get from being here, and that we'll pray for more of that, and that we'll take more of that into the world when we leave here, today, tomorrow, and the rest of the week....And then we'll come back and pray some more, for unity, for kindness, for love, for a sense that we are all one, AND for the behavior that looks like unity and kindness and love.

Some of us may believe our world is a mess, that we're so divided we may never find our way to a place of peace and unity. Corinth was a mess two-thousand years ago; but, Paul introduced a sort of counter-culture of love and forgiveness---Christianity—and here we are today, still embracing them. Here we are today, still claiming to be one body because we all partake of the same bread, Christ himself. My hope for us all is that we can act like it.

Amen.