Pastor Roy's sermon from January 26, 2014

Children's sermon: Stumbling in the dark. What is light? What is dark? What do you do when it is dark? Can't see as well... Epiphany/photon

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Epiphany faith finds and follows the light which is Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians to be of the same mind and purpose. That mind and purpose is the light of Christ. It is this mind and purpose which united the Corinthians and it unites us too.

Paul is not telling us to ignore our differences, to pretend we have the same opinions about everything. Neither is he telling us to avoid conflict at all cost. After all, the cross was a great conflict with the most of the leaders of Jesus' day. In the cross Jesus declares that the powerful. . .the "movers and shakers" of the day had it wrong. He had called them to justice, mercy, and humility before God. The cross was their answer to his call. The mind and purpose of Christ is his choice to love justice in the face of greed and despair. No matter the cost. He is free because he chooses compassion. Oh, there are still difficult decisions, but those who set themselves according to the mind and purpose of Christ at least have an outline of mercy. It sets us free.

Could Paul be telling us that we are united, not by what we do, but by how we do it? *When* we have conflict it should be with respect. Respect for the other, and respect for ourselves. There is always dignity even when we sharply disagree. And among the faithful, there is always unity in Christ, which should mean mutual dignity, honor, respect. If we have conflict without respect, we do as much harm to ourselves as the other, regardless. There is always a nugget of human dignity which preserves us all. This is the grace of God. If we think of others apart from the grace of God, we too will follow into that darkness.

Christ calls us to follow him into practicing love.   At times we are baffled by the thoughts and actions of others. Our own are often no less baffling. We cannot understand all the details. We cannot understand what is going on in the mind of the other. Later in chapter 13 Paul expresses the unifying power of love and respect . He is not talking about romantic love, but love for sisters and brothers in the local church when he says,

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

In other words love looks out for the other and assumes the best rather than the worst about another's intentions. *This is hard work*. . .because it doesn't come naturally for any of us. Isn't our natural inclination to assume the worst of others and the best of ourselves and our friends?   But if we decide that someone has done a significant wrong in the past, then we tend to stop expecting good things at all from that person from that point on. We take relational short cuts. "Oh, I know what is going on here-- my assumptions are probably right." Time and time again.

Paul tells us to set aside our emotional and relational short cuts and get down to the hard work of love. To Andrew and Peter and the other disciples, Jesus said, "Follow me!" . . .And they did, knowing very little what they were about to learn, the light of love. The hard work of love. Fishing for people.

Christ is calling to us today, "Will you follow me?" Will you follow me into respect and hopefulness that upholding the dignity of even our enemy will bring us freedom? For if I can find the dignity in others, surely then I should be able to respect myself as well. I believe self-respect is one of the foundational goals of our lives. Isn't it "funny" that our journey into self-respect involves discovering it in others first? This is not an easy path, but it is the path to freedom to which Christ is calling each of us when he says, "Follow me. "

Thanks be to God.