

Sermon: Same Mind and Same Purpose

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, January 25, 2026)

A young pastor has a serious problem in his new congregation. During the worship service, half the congregation stood for the prayers and half remained seated, and each side shouted at the other, insisting that theirs was the true tradition. Nothing the pastor said or did moved toward solving the impasse. Finally, in desperation, the young pastor sought out the congregation's 99-year-old founder. He met the old man in the nursing home and poured out his troubles.

"Please tell me," he pleaded, "was it the tradition for the congregation to stand during the prayers?" "No," answered the old man. "Ah," responded the young pastor, "then it was the tradition to sit during the prayers?" "No," answered the old man. "Well," the young man replied impatiently, "what we have is complete chaos! Half the people stand and shout, and the other half sit and scream." "Ah," said the founder, "*that* was the tradition."

Division in human society is nothing new. Unfortunately, it is no better in Christian congregations. We like to think where two or three are gathered, God is there in their midst. In fact, didn't Jesus promise precisely that in the gospel account of Matthew 18:20? It is a passage set in the context of reconciliation, that if two or three, in conflict, are gathered in an effort to reconcile, then God will be there in their midst.

It's a comforting thought. O how I wish that were true, and the presence of God would resolve conflicts, but in reality, at least in my experience and limited perspective, it is more likely when two or three are gathered, four entrenched positions would emerge and nobody is willing to yield. Don't take my word for it, just look at what was happening at the newly minted congregation in Corinth in the 1st century AD, where the Apostle Paul urgently appealed to brothers and sister in Christ, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that "*all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose.*" (1 Corinthians 1:10)

The Corinthians, as we have come to know them, were a mix bag of Jewish and Gentile Christians gathered in port city of Corinth, a prosperous trading outpost in the Roman Empire. The congregation was planted by Paul in his second missionary journey, around 50 AD, as recorded in Acts 18. Supported by Timothy and Silas, his partners in mission, and working with Priscilla and Aquila, local tent-makers turned church leaders, Paul lived and preached in the city for over eighteen months, before moving on to another locale. No sooner had Paul departed, he began to receive accounts of significant issues faced by the

church, including disunity, immorality, and false teaching, promoting Paul to write multiple letters to them, to address these problems.

The passage we've read in 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 this morning, highlights the problem of Christian division of a particular form, as Paul writes in verse 12, "*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.'*" Apparently, four factions had emerged in the congregation, each claiming loyalty to a particular leader.

Cephas was Peter, the widely acknowledged Apostle and head of the earthly church, well at least the first one in Jerusalem. Apollos was a charismatic, intellectual Jewish Christian, whose partnership with Paul in the Corinthian ministry was acknowledged by Paul, as in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*" Peter, Paul, Apollos were all capable leaders of the early church, and Christ Jesus was somehow thrown in as, ostensibly, the head of the fourth faction.

The issue of baptism seemed to have compounded this division. Those who were baptized by these church leaders, seemed to have taken on the view that loyalty is owed to these leaders, even if it was not demanded. It was a ludicrous situation, a silly division that should've never been, prompting Paul to ask rhetorically, "Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" Certainly, and hopefully not!

I recall somewhere along the way, during my previous pastoral ministry in Montreal, I noticed a disturbing pattern of bloc-voting in the Presbytery—particularly amongst four presbyters, of one minister and three elders. Issue by issue, this bloc would vote exactly the same way. Not only myself, a few close colleagues of mine, fellow ministers, observed also the same pattern. We discussed it, were troubled by it, lamented that presbyters should not be behaving that way, acting in concert, forming a faction within the church court.

That is until we realized what that bloc had called us; they had given us a name—the College boys. You see, these close colleagues of mine, mostly male ministers, had formed also a close bond. We tended to gather on Tuesday morning at the library of the Presbyterian College, unprompted, for the stated purpose of doing exegesis, essentially researching on the upcoming Scripture passages we were preparing to preach on. And yes, during those studying sessions, and during breaks and lunch at the courtyard, we also talked about Presbytery matters.

Over time, it became natural that we would tend vote in concert, our views on multiple issues tended to converge. Isn't it funny that one can easily point out the fault of others, when one makes the same mistake all the same. It is just like what Jesus said in Matthew 7:3, "*Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye?*"

Upon realizing how other presbyters may have perceived us, we made changes. No we did not break up the so-called “College boys”, but we kept our discussions focused on the Scriptures, away from any Presbytery related matters. And we certainly refrained from discussing how we intended to vote during Presbytery meetings.

When Paul urged the Corinthians to have the same mind and same purpose, it was not simply asking them to be in agreement, but to discern the mind of Christ, to follow the way of Christ, and to have the same mind and same purpose as Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Furthermore, he urged the Corinthians and urges all of us, to come back and focus on the message about the cross. It is a message not of division, faction nor power, but about self-giving, self-emptying and self-sacrificing. It is the message that Christ Jesus wrote with his own life from the cross, a message of *“foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Something amazing is happening in Mistissini, Quebec. It is a Cree town, located within Baie-James Municipality, or about 10 hours drive north and north-east of Ottawa. Though it is the second largest Cree community in the area, the population is only about 4,000. Over the past few weeks, a what can only be described as an youth revival has broken out in that town. Pictures and videos emerge out of that revival are just defying belief. Sixteen hundred people, almost half of the population of Mistissini, led by the youth, have been gathering in local community centre, confession their sins, repenting before Christ, before a wooden cross. They are weeping, singing, dancing, praising and worshiping God. They gather for hours, from morning to evening, and they would not depart. They come back day after day, and they would not depart.

Not just young people, people from all walks of life are coming, people who have long been caught in intergenerational trauma from a long history of colonialism and the legacy of residential schools were coming and finding Jesus. It was reported that even local drug dealers, bootleggers were coming to that gathering, confessing their sins and asking to be prayed for. It can only be described as a good old fashioned Christian revival, a genuine outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the most unlikely of locale. And It has caught the band council and even the local church completely by surprise. They do not know what to do. No one does! I invite you to look it up, Google it, AI it, or however you do your online search. Look up “Mistissini revival”, and see for yourself.

I am privy to a bit of the back story though. For the past five years, ever since arriving here in Ottawa, I have been involved in a mentoring group, led by Glenn Smith, who is now a faculty of the Presbyterian College. (I may have mentioned this before, Glenn and I go way back).

Glenn travels to Ottawa every few months or so, and lead a group of pastors, through bible study, mutual sharing and intercessory prayers. One of the pastors in that group is Paul Racine. Paul is a seasoned pastor himself, the former senior minister of Sunnyside Wesleyan Church in Ottawa South. For the past twenty or so years, Paul has been travelling to Mistissini on short-term mission, holding summer youth retreat, working to equip and build up local youth leaders. It was a thankless job, going against the grain of Canadian political and popular media discourse, and against the hardship of the north and the back drop of a host of societal crisis including rampant alcohol and drug use, hyper unemployment and teen suicide rate.

Our mentoring group pray with Paul and for Paul over the years. Then last summer, Paul reported to us something unexpected. During the youth retreat, a few Cree youth wanted to be baptized, so Paul took them down the local pond, dipped them under water in a typical Christian baptismal rite. More youth followed suit, wanted the same, and started to line up along the shore to be baptized. What Paul thought would be a twenty minutes thing would turn out to be hours on end, with no end in sight. His body was frozen from frigid water, his hands losing grip, but he prayed to God for strength, to finish what he started. Hundred of people were baptized that day. That was only last summer.

In the Fall of 2025, Paul was asked by a few youth leaders of Mistissini to go up, to start a group. But for some unexplainable reason, as he shared with the mentoring group, God seems to have wanted him to stay put. So he declined the invitation, but empowered those youth leaders to strike out one their own, and to trust that God would provide. So they did. It started slow, a few young people in a cramped home, then it grew the following week, dozens came and it grew. They got a local church to open their basement to accommodate the gathering and it grew, hundreds came. They had to move to a bigger location, and got the band council to open up the biggest community centre in town, and the rest is history.

As Pastor Paul Racine recounted, he now realized it was right that God had prevented him from going up to Mistissini in the Fall of last year. Had he gone, the group would've defer to him, a white man leading a group Cree youth, and the group would not have experienced the growth we are now seeing. He takes no credit for this youth revival, but with the only wish those recent convert to faith would be properly instructed in the way of Christ, so the spirit of revival that has been fanned into flame would continue across the rest of the north.

And who knows, that flame might even come to Ottawa one day. Isn't that what all of us have been praying for?

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**