

“Division”  
 Isaiah 9:1-4  
 1 Cor. 1:10-18  
 Rev. David Hutchinson  
 Sunday, January 26, 2020

“Me and math have a love hate relationship.”

That’s the first line of a poem about math, written by a student in a GED class held in Massachusetts, in a class taught by a man named Phillip Howard. / He asked all of his students to write about their relationship with mathematics. / That was the assignment. / All of the examples - - describe - - problems in the relationship.

Here are some more - - first lines:

“When it comes time to do math I always get a little scared.

My relationship with math is complicated.

I have a problem...a math problem.

Math is always throwing problems at me.

I have a serious problem - - with math.”

Not everyone would say they have a problem with math. / Some people LIKE math. / And as some of you know - - I’m not bad at it - - for a theologian.

But whether you like it or not - - math is about - - problems.

My college calculus professor would always begin class by walking up to the chalk board - - turning and looking at us - - and asking:

“Problems with the problems?”

The Biblical texts today are BOTH about problems.

In fact they are about DIVISION problems.

Not - - long division - - the inverse of multiplication - - but division nonetheless.

The biblical readings for today are about:

The division of people - - from one another.

The division of light - - from darkness.

AND - - the very division of Christ himself.

And these things are - - indeed - - problems.

Division problems.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote about divisions in the early church. / In his letters to the church in Corinth he stressed UNITY more than just about anything else.

Because - - - there were division problems.

There were division problems - - so Paul emphasized - - unity - - as the solution.

The problem was - - that people did NOT AGREE with one another.

We have not exactly SOLVED the problem!

But maybe it helps to review what Paul wrote about it.

In the early church in Corinth a major division was about baptism.

There were factions.

Paul had followers...

Apollos had followers...

Cephas had followers...

And there's nothing wrong with followers - - per-se.

BUT - - the problem was - - all of these leaders - - needed to be united.

And their followers needed to be united.

It's OK to follow someone - - as long as that doesn't lead AWAY from Christ.

But these followers of various people - - were forgetting that they were all united under Christ - - following the same God - - for the same goals.

It had gotten to the point that Paul said their divisions - - were dividing Christ!

To understand that claim - - it is important to understand Paul's idea of the Body of Christ. / For Paul - - the CHURCH WAS the body of the risen Christ. / We are CHRIST in the WORLD - - living by the Holy Spirit. / That's how Paul saw it.

So if we are divided from one another - - we are REBREAKING Jesus.

The reason for our unity - - was to keep Christ from being ripped apart.

Again.

Jesus died on a cross - - to reconcile EVERYONE - - in God's love.

Jesus body was broken - - in the process.

So if we are reuniting that body when we gather - - it's pretty important.

When we gather and worship...

When we gather and break bread...

Jesus body - - comes together.

And so if we are NOT united - - but rather divided - - that's a problem.

That was Paul's - - division problem.

In the Old Testament - - centuries earlier - - the prophet Isaiah - - had a division problem as well. / For Isaiah - - it was about LIGHT - - and DARKNESS.

According to Isaiah - - there are PEOPLE who are in darkness.

And there are people who - - are in the LIGHT.

But Isaiah's vision - - of what God brings - - is LIGHT:

Light for those who were in darkness.

Well it turns out that Isaiah's problem - - is a LOT like Paul's problem.

Because - - the DARKNESS that Isaiah described - - also DIVIDED - - people.

The people in Zebulun and Naphtali were divided from the people in Israel.

These were the places of foreigners - - who were seen as threatening.

But according to Isaiah - - God's LIGHT could shine - - anywhere!

There would come a time when God's light would UNITE people.

People who had been threatening and foreign - - would unite.

United in God's light.

So Isaiah's DIVISION problem - - is SIMILAR to Paul's division problem.

The problem - - is that PEOPLE - - are so divided.

So as I thought about this - - I wondered - - could DIVISION ever be GOOD?

Division is a problem - - in math - - but...

It's called a problem - - but we DO it.

We work the problem.

As I wondered about DIVISION as a GOOD thing - - I thought of Genesis.

In the Bible - - the first book of the Bible - - Genesis - - the beginning of  
everything - - is described. / The creation of the world.

And as God created the world - - what did God DO?

God DIVIDED.

Light is DIVIDED from DARKENSS!

It's the very FIRST creative act.

It gives BIRTH to EVERYTHING!!

Like a CELL dividing - - giving birth to ALL of LIFE!

So if cell division is a GOOD thing...

And if it is important - - sometimes - - to divide light from darkness...

Could division - - sometimes be - - GOOD?

Hmmm...

My division problem just got more complicated.

As MATH problems often do...

Well - - maybe division could be good - - IF - - the division brought LIFE and not DEATH. / Like CELL division! / Maybe the division could be good - - if it was GOOD for PEOPLE - - and somehow brought people TOGETHER - - brought people into UNTIY. / Maybe...!

BUT - - could it EVER be OK - - to even - - divide PEOPLE from each other?

Well - - I'm not so sure about that.

After all the FIRST problem was - - the division of people.

And even the darkness problem - - was really about that too.

BUT - maybe if a person is hurt - - or victimized - - it is important to divide the WOUNDED party - - from the AGRESSOR. / Divide the victim - - from the perpetrator. / That makes sense to me...

But - - aren't aggressors - - and perpetrators - - in fact DIVIDED in themselves.

So to be truly UNITED - - FIRST we all need - - some INNER unity.

Be united within yourself.

Unite yourself - - with the light of Christ.

And THEN - - unite the Body of Christ - - the community - - the people.

Maybe that's the solution - - to the division problem.

Wondering about all of this - - I went back to the text again.

And when I did - - I noticed - - Chloe.

Chloe is mentioned in the New Testament - - in first Corinthians.

Did you NOTICE her too?

Who - - exactly - - is Chloe?

Paul refers to her “people”.

Chloe’s people - - were the ones who FIRST pointed out - - the PROBLEM!

Paul wrote about this - - division problem - - because of Chloe.

She - - somehow - - had the MORAL AUTHORITY to get Paul’s attention.

What does that take - - I wondered?

What does it take - - to be TRUSTED enough - - to be believed?

Who - - gets to say - - what is a problem?

THAT seems to be a PROBLEM - - in OUR world.

At least it does to me.

Who has the moral authority to point out problems?

Greta Thunberg - - the young climate activist?

The whistleblower - - whoever that is?

The president?

Congress?

The Senate?

The church?

And if you’re a recently DIVIDED church - - like the Methodists...

Which HALF of the church?

So - - back to the Bible - - WHO - - is this Chloe?

She's somehow - - someone - - with moral authority.

Wow - - do I long for HER - - to show up again! //

On a related topic: I got a notice in the mail recently about a recall on my car.

My car is 9 years old and has 120,000 miles on it.

It works GREAT! / It has for YEARS!

But now all of a sudden I get this letter in the mail that it has a PROBLEM.

Should I believe the letter? / Throw it away?

Is this REALLY a problem?

Seems like there's PLENTY of possible PROBLEMS - - to FRET about.

Maybe we really DO have some - - problems with the problems.

Maybe the problem - - is knowing what really IS a problem.

And then - - having the moral authority - - to address it.

Whatever we decide to do - - I hope we will remember Paul's main hope - - was  
the we find our UNITY - - in Christ. / That we find our hope - - like Isaiah did - - in the  
promise of God's light - - WHICH was intended to UNITE the whole world.

I think we MAY just have a division problem or two.

But I think some of the problems CAN be solved.

IF - - we listen to the Chloe's in our world.

AND if - - we TRUST the LIGHT.

May it be so - - for you and for me.

As we breath deep - - and try to trust - - I'll end today with one of those poems  
from the GED math class I mentioned at the start:

This is by a student named Leonidis

“I have a serious Problem with math,

I solve one, then another yet another.

But still the day passes, the sun sets,

The moon rises and the night falls and by then so

Much has transpired.

So much in fact that I forgot what I’ve learned and solved to an extent.

But I can’t give up, for you see the dawn

Breaks and the sun rises, I awake and I know

I can count on Phil to lend a hand

And reiterate - - on this new day.