

The Real Thing
1 Corinthians 1:10-18, Acts 18:1-4

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In **1971, Coca Cola Company produced a genuinely iconic commercial.** I'm sure many of you know it.

***“I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love.
Grow apple trees and honeybees and snow-white turtle doves.
I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony.
I'd like to buy the world a coke to keep it company.
What the world wants today is the real thing.”***

It was a difficult time. WWII was not that long ago. The Vietnam war was raging. College campuses were in an uproar. Civil Rights protests were everywhere. The country was still reeling from the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. It was a difficult time. That commercial answered a common need: a need for belonging, unity, a sense of all being one.

It didn't work. We did not all come together as one. It was a nice commercial, but Coca Cola did not make us all live in harmony. It was not the real thing. We kept on being divided and splintered.

It seems like arguing and quarrelling is our default setting. Watch the news. There are MAGA Republicans and Rino Republicans. Log Cabin Republicans and Nikki Haley Republicans. Marjory Taylor Green and Mike Johnson are both Republicans but they're hardly united.

The same is true of Democrats. There are Yellow Dog Democrats and Blue Dog Democrats, and then there's the Squad running around in the middle causing trouble. I'm always reminded of what the comedian Will Rogers said. “I'm not a member or an organized political party. I'm a Democrat.”

Once again, college campuses are in an uproar. Will we have another Kent State some day soon.

It's not like Christianity is setting a good example. There are Catholics and Orthodox and Protestants. There are Presbyterians and Lutherans and Baptists, Church of Christ, United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ. Some denominations refuse to talk to each other. Unity, a sense of belonging, is sadly missing.

The world, our country, even our community are divided and splintered. We desperately need unity. We need the real thing. Can the church provide that? The real thing?

Sometime around 50AD, about 20 years after Jesus' death, Paul goes to Corinth. We don't know how long he stays, but it must have been for an extended period. As is his habit, he spends time at the Synagogue spreading the good news of Jesus. Apparently, he has some success.

You would think these new Christians would all be united. That they would be one. They're a small group in a very large Roman world. But we find, after Paul leaves, they start turning on each other, hyping up their differences. **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? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? [1 Corinthians 1:12-13](#)** Paul says this is not the way we should be living. We should not be practicing spiritual one-upmanship.

No, Paul says. We should be united. **(Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, 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 united in the same mind and for the same purpose. [1 Corinthians 1:10](#)).** Why be united? What's the purpose of our unity? **(For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel. [1 Corinthians 1:17](#))** Our purpose is to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. Tell the world God loves us. That's the unity we need. That's the real thing.

Paul is saying the world needs us to be united in sharing the good news of God's love, something the UCC is ideally situated to do. It's how we're made. We're an amalgam of different strains of Christianity all coming together, choosing to live as one. It's our stated purpose. Look at the great seal of the UCC. What does it say along the bottom? **"That they may all be one."** That's from **John 17**, Jesus' prayer just before he's arrested. That they may all be one.

Our world needs the real thing, but the real thing is not Coca Cola. The real thing is the unity and love we find in Jesus Christ. Not unity based on the sacraments, or whether or not purgatory exists, or if women should be pastors. We can agree to disagree on a lot of things. Our unity is based on God's love. Our unity is in our common commitment to proclaiming God's good news.

Friends, this is our mission: showing the world we can disagree about a lot of things, and still be united. Still be one. This is what we, the church, can do for the world. We can show the world diverse people coming together, agreeing to disagree but committed to being one in the love of God we find in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Beloved, our unity is in Jesus. Not Coke, not politics, not denominations. Our unity is in Jesus. He is the real thing. Thanks be to God. Alleluia, Amen.