

## Whose Team Are You On?

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*1 Corinthians 3:4-9 — When one of you says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are one, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.*

I don't make all that many cultural references when I preach, but our passage from 1 Corinthians this morning has me thinking about Twilight and The Hunger Games. Now, you don't need to have read the books or seen the movies in order to get my reference — I haven't read any of the Twilight books, and I've only read the first Hunger Games book, and I've only seen the first movie in both series. Regardless of how familiar or unfamiliar you are with these fiction franchises, you may very well have heard the terms "Team Edward and Team Jacob" or "Team Peeta and Team Gale." Who here has heard one or both of those? Well, to catch you up on what the young 'uns were talking about five years ago, both Twilight and The Hunger Games feature one female protagonist, who is young and beautiful, as well as two male protagonists, who are also young and beautiful, and in both storylines the woman must choose one or the other man as her primary love interest. Now, in response to both women's predicament (a rather enviable one, I must say), millions of fans decided for themselves which man they thought Bella in Twilight or Katniss in The Hunger Games should choose. With passion and conviction, fans selected a side and took their stand — via Twitter and t-shirts, Facebook and notebooks, and everything in between. From all of that, we got Team Edward and Team Jacob, for Twilight, and Team Peeta and Team Gale, for The Hunger Games.

It's a little silly of me, but when I read this morning's passage, I imagine Team Paul and Team Apollos, with fan clubs fighting each other over which one should win the church in Corinth. Apparently, Paul thought it was silly, too. "When one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos,' are you not merely human? [In other words, aren't you acting as if you didn't have God as your guide?] What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each." In other words, Paul is saying, "There's no need to get all riled up about this! You don't need to choose one of our ministries over the other, because really, the two of us aren't the ones in charge here, and ultimately, we're both on the same team!" If Paul were alive today, I imagine that he would say to those millions of fans, "What is there to fight over? You all already like Twilight, already like The Hunger Games! Just bond over that, why don't you?"

But it turns out that people — and especially Christians, I think — are pretty good at this kind of silly fighting. For some reason, it seems that our most vicious fights are often reserved for those people who are actually quite similar to us. We agree on so much, but it's the *little* differences — even more so than the big ones — that often bother us the most. Some of the nastiest things I heard about Hillary Clinton were from Bernie supporters, and vice versa. Most of the violent acts committed by extremist Muslims have directly targeted other Muslims. And I myself feel far more anger towards certain Christians than I do towards any Muslim, Hindu, or atheist I've ever met. ... You know, just to use some light, uncontroversial examples. The point is: we can look a lot like the Corinthians here, dividing our one team into sides, fueling division when we could work towards unity.

The church's history of theological disagreement — a long and occasionally brutal history — has some poignant stories for us on this point. Here's one story from the Reformation (and see, this is why I made the children's sermon about how great the Reformation was — because I'm about to diss some reformers). The German reformer Martin Luther and the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli had a lot in common: they were both disturbed by many of the same norms in the Catholic church, and they held compatible theologies on the trinity, sin, salvation, and more. But one thing they could not agree on was the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. And lemme tell you, they could not tolerate this disagreement. Luther wrote a book called *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*, directed at Zwingli. The Swiss reformer responded by writing *The Friendly Rejoinder and Rebuttal to the Sermon of the Eminent Martin Luther against the Fanatics*. In general, Zwingli liked to keep the peace, and Luther liked to start a fight. After a few years of the back-and-forth, a German prince asked the two theologians to come together and try to compose a theological statement that could unite their supporters. Zwingli agreed eagerly; Luther agreed begrudgingly. At the meeting, the two of them came to a consensus on 14 theological points, but when they tried to agree on a 15th, about the Eucharist, the whole operation became threatened: the tone became combative, stubborn, and self-righteous, with plenty of harsh insults heaved at each other from the hills they were ready to die on. Team Luther and Team Zwingli were a hot mess.

Breaking into the fray, the apostle Paul says: Who is Luther? Who is Zwingli? Servants. They are servants of the same God. They have the same purpose, planting and watering the fields of faith, and so they are working together. They are one. Friends, all of us — even the big shots like Luther, Zwingli, and Paul — are servants of God. No more and no less. And not only are we servants of God; we are also servants of each other. Jesus said that whoever among his followers wishes to be the greatest must be their servant. My prayer is that we — both the small “we” of this congregation and the big “we” of churches all over the world — would think about the team before we think about the sides and remember that we are one in our call to serve God and each other.

Now, having said that, I do believe that there are times when we are called to take sides. There are situations in which we should argue vehemently within the family of faith. Sometimes, servants have to take a stand for their master. Paul thought so, too. He could look a lot more like

Luther than like Zwingli. I'll be honest with you, friends: I am acutely aware of the possibility that there will come a time when I feel compelled to take a stand, more so than to keep the peace. There may come a time when I feel compelled to say, with regards to a very particular, concrete, and contentious matter, "No. I oppose that, and I believe that God opposes that, so let's fight it together." As for if or when that time will come, know that I am earnestly seeking the guidance of God's Spirit, who I trust has spoken and will continue speaking through me and through all of you. And know that, as your pastor, my utmost desire is to be a servant of the God who is Love — in whose name we all pray together, all journey together. Amen.