

9/15/2019

Open Minds

Luke 24:45-47; Romans 14:1-12; Romans 8:6; 12:2r

Topic: United Methodist followers of Jesus are called to have open minds in a diverse community united by commitment to Christ.

This morning I'd like to start with something on the lighter side, which I thought was funny in a way, that goes back quite a way. There was a lifelong supporter of the liberal labor party in Great Britain who was lying on his death bed when he suddenly decided to join the conservative Tory party. "But why?" asked his puzzled friend, "You're labor through and through... Why change now?" The man leaned forward and explained, "Well, I'd rather it was one of them that died and not one of us." I imagine there were some Tories who reasoned the same. :)

With all that happened in our country eighteen years ago (the terrorist attacks on New York, Washington DC, and the jetliner that crashed in Pennsylvania), and the subsequent wars and ongoing concerns of personal, community and national security, it may be difficult for us to remember that our Christian faith is one rooted in God's love for all humanity. Yet, we can also turn to the heroic and self-sacrificial response of people with differing beliefs and backgrounds of many kinds on that day and since, to counter terrorism, tyranny and oppression in various forms.

† **Now more than ever, we have a message to proclaim and live out** – a message of salvation and hope for the world, a message of God's redeeming and reconciling love to those near and far.

Scott J. Jones, Assistant Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University once said, "At its best, Christianity offers open hearts, open minds and open doors." Today we pick up the theme of open minds.

We remember the words found in Luke's account of the gospel, after Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. Later that day, he also appeared to the eleven disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. At first, they were afraid, but then after showing his hands and feet, inviting them to touch him and asking for food . . .

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ***'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'***" Luke 24:45-47 (NIV)

You see, as United Methodists and as all followers of Jesus, our main focus should be upon sharing the good news of God's love in and through Jesus Christ. And as Bishop Peggy Johnson shared with us at the Bishop's Day on the Wilmington District last Thursday night -- even when we may not be able to use his name, such as at times in public schools or other places, we can still show, demonstrate, or BE the love of Jesus.

There are so many people in our community and in our world, who are lost, lonely or hurting in some way. There are so many in need spiritually, emotionally or physically. That is why we engage in the ministry and missions here at church, in our community, and around the world. Yes, now more than ever, we have a message to proclaim and live out.

So first, our minds must be open to the good news of the risen Christ!

† **Having an open mind means that you acknowledge that the person with whom you are disagreeing might be right and you might be wrong.**

Each of us must keep inquiring about the true meaning of Scripture and about its best application in a particular situation. John Wesley said that the only thing we know for sure is that we have made mistakes somewhere (in matters of opinion, not in matters essential to the faith). Thus, the place where you disagree with your sister or brother might be precisely the place where you need to learn from her or him.

In the process of living in Christian community, our disagreements will often lead to conflict. We will say and do things that are wrong.

It would be best for us to consider the examples from the early Christian church and heed the words of the Apostle Paul. They disputed over dietary restrictions from the Jewish Law of the Hebrew Scriptures, given by God through Moses and others. He said:

“Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

“One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone.

“If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’ So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.” (Romans 14:1-12 NIV)

So, even in the first few decades after Christ’s resurrection, the Christian community was a diverse one. There were people from many different nations, different economic conditions, and different religious backgrounds. By becoming Christians they had joined a community that proclaimed they were one in Christ (Galatians 3:27-29). Yet differences remained as the whole letter of 1 Corinthians shows.

Paul says here that in matters of opinion, the members of the Christian community are not to quarrel. Vegetarianism and the observance of special days are examples of subjects on which differing opinions were to be tolerated.

At the same time the community is committed to both living and dying to the Lord. This represents the strong witness contained in the New Testament on the basics of the faith. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh who proclaimed God’s new reign on earth, died for our sins, and was resurrected as the promise of hope and resurrection for all who believe in him. John Wesley in his sermon “Catholic Spirit” was firm in teaching people that there were essential parts of the Christian faith that made up having a right relationship with God. This relationship is what God is offering to the whole world, and it is the job of Christians to bear witness to that inclusive love.

In the twenty-first century the diversity of Christianity around the world shows that there are many ways of being Christian. Among those who agree on the basics and who are committed to living and dying in Christ, there are disagreements and tensions. Thus, Wesley, in full agreement with Paul’s message to the Roman believers, calls for mutual respect and tolerance in all matters of opinion.

Perhaps one might go farther and say that our diversity of ideas and approaches to living the Christian life enriches our community. Here at CCUMC we value and enjoy both traditional and contemporary music and worship, and even some combinations and variations of both. Some Christians often point out new forms of social injustice that challenge existing power structures. Some Christians focus on the importance of traditional teachings that might keep the church true to God’s intention for all of us.

Scott J. Jones asserts that “In all of this we need to avoid passing judgments on other persons. Judging ideas is both important and necessary. But to judge a person is to usurp God’s role. As Paul puts it, they are ‘servants of another’ and ‘It is before their

own lord that they stand or fall.’ Thus, within the Christian family we should be able to acknowledge that we belong to the same Lord despite our disagreements over matters of opinion or even interpretation of the scriptures.”

That leaves me with just one more thing to say.

† **We can still live, learn, grow and serve together in Christ.**

We can acknowledge that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life that we seek and share with others. As our mission statement affirms . . . *“We are a Community called to Invite people to Jesus Christ, Grow disciples of Jesus Christ and Show the love of Jesus Christ.”*

We do that in a variety of ways: some just mentioned, others lifted up in our bulletin and newsletters. This month’s ministry/mission focus is on our Sunday School, or as Michelle Hemelt likes to call it, “Sunday Fun-day.” Yes, learning about God, Jesus and others from the Bible can be fun! It’s all a matter of how you look at it and see it!

So, let me ask . . .

How have you been blessed by the wisdom and truth of God’s love and grace through Jesus Christ?

How have you felt challenged by other thoughts, opinions and understandings of the Holy Scriptures, the Bible?

What have you learned, or how have you grown by those differences? How is the Holy Spirit leading you in Christ to share in fellowship, conversation, and service to the Lord?

Take some time today or during the week to answer these questions in prayer or with others. And may the God of all wisdom and truth bless you and keep you in all of your ways, through all of your days! Amen.