

**Many Parts but One Body**  
**Mark 3:20-35**  
**1 Cor 12:4-6, 12-20**  
**June 10, 2018 – Third Sunday after Pentecost**

So a crowd has gathered around Jesus seeking teaching and healing. And the religious leaders are saying that he must be possessed by a demon, for he's casting demons out of people. And Jesus responds: "That doesn't make sense. Why would Satan cast out Satan? Satan would not work to his own demise." Then Jesus issues this warning: "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand; and, a house divided against itself cannot stand." It was a battle cry of the North during the Civil War – "A house divided against itself cannot stand." But I sometimes think that we have failed to learn that lesson.

It seems that we have all too often developed "an attitude," an attitude that says, "If you're not like me, or you don't agree with me, or your ideas are different than mine, then you must be wrong or even evil." It was John Wesley that said, "On matters essential – unity; on matters unessential – diversity; in all things love." But somehow, it seems that today, we are all too quick to label things as "essential."

Now I'll be the first to admit that I have some pretty strong opinions on things, particularly issues of social justice and environmental wellness. But I also try to make the point that I welcome differences of opinion. I welcome folks challenging my beliefs. I also hope that folks will welcome my challenging their beliefs; because, in the challenging, in the healthy debating, in the listening to each other growth occurs. (Did you hear the "listening" statement. It's been said that God gave us two ears and only one mouth. We should listen twice as much as we speak; and by listening, I mean actively listening, actively seeking to understand what the other person is saying.)

I remember a time, now about ten years ago. I was Associate Pastor of a large church; and an active member of the congregation took issue with something I said in a sermon, and made an appointment to speak to me about it. My Senior Pastor apologized to me saying, "You spoke well. You don't deserve needing to put up with someone taking issue with what you said." I replied to my Senior Pastor, "Don't apologize. First of all, if he's taking issue with what I said, he was listening. He heard me, at least on some level. Secondly, if he's coming to see me, I'm presented with another teaching moment, another opportunity to lead, to guide, to share the love of Christ. And thirdly, and possibly most importantly, there is probably at least some validity in what he has to say, and so this is not only a teaching moment by a learning moment. Whatever he has to say to me, I will learn from it. It's all good!

I welcome diversity. I enjoy diversity in music, although most of what I listen to is some form of classical with a little jazz thrown in for good measure.

(As an aside, I might note that a recent Oxford University study indicates that listening to just 12 minutes of classical music every day is good for your brain.) I also enjoy diversity in food. I enjoy diversity in culture which is why I love to travel. But there's a difference between diversity and division; and I am greatly concerned about what seems to be growing divisions in our lives.

I can't count the number of families that I know who are severely divided, brothers and sisters not speaking to each other. Why, I have some family friends – sisters that don't speak to each other over a financial dispute years ago. (You know, family divisions often seem to be over some financial issue.) Anyway, both halves of this fractured family came to my sister's funeral. They made a point of coming and going by different doors, and they sat on opposite sides of the room so they would not need to speak to each other. Now I'm well aware that one side cannot heal a relationship. Both sides need to desire healing. So, don't hear this as criticism, if you are among those whose family is experiencing division. Do hear this as a call to prayer – prayer that somehow, someday healing might occur.

But division doesn't just happen in families. You and I can both probably name businesses that were torn apart because of division among the leadership or, in some cases, division in the ranks of the employees. I have never known a business that was successful in the long term if the employees were disgruntled.

Then there is the church. I really like the current pope, Pope Francis. I like him because he really cares about social justice; and, I like him because he is all about ending division. Through the history of the Christian church, at least for the last millennium, we have been a church divided; and sometimes we have been divided over the silliest things. You know the first major split in the church happened in 1066 AD, when the Eastern Orthodox Church split from the Roman Catholic Church. Do you know what the split over? Whether the Holy Spirit descended from the Father and the Son or just from the Father. Oh yes, then there was the other major item – whether we should use leavened or unleavened bread for communion. Now, yes, there are matters of theology behind both these issues, still. . . . On matters essential – unity; on matters unessential – diversity. I ask you, “These matters may be important, but are they really essential?”

Then there is the United Methodist Church. Most of you know that our congregations are divided right now over issues of LGBTQ rights – rights to marriage; and rights to ordination. Many of you know that a commission has been formed called *The Way Forward*, and our bishops have called a special General Conference for February 2019 to try to deal with the issue of justice for all people and still not split the church. Nobody knows what might come out of that General Conference or what the reaction of various congregations will be following General Conference. I do ask for your continued prayers for our denomination.

Still, I am perhaps most concerned about divisions in our country. Yes we have always had Democrats and Republicans, and we have always had differences of opinion; but I do not remember a time when the houses of congress were so

divided that it was almost considered anathema to reach across the aisle. It seems there is a whole lot of talking going on in our nation's capital and not much listening, and friends, that needs to change because a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. And I wish that I could say the division is limited to Washington, but it's happening in our state capitals, and it's happening on our streets. Let me repeat: There is too much talking going on, and not enough listening.

John Wesley said, "In things nonessential – diversity." I might take that one step further to suggest that even in things that might be considered essential, diversity is a good thing. Isn't that what Paul was saying in First Corinthians. "There are different spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit. . . There are many body parts, but one body." There is only one body. There is only one family of God. There is only one Spirit.

Our Gospel Lesson concludes today with the crowd telling Jesus that his mother and brothers and sisters are outside and Jesus replying with what appears to be a troubling denial of his family. Friends, don't misinterpret this. We know that Jesus cared for his family. One of his last words from the cross was his charge to his disciple to care for his mother; and Jesus brother became the head of the Christian church in Jerusalem. So what's this verse really saying? It's saying, "Whoever does the will of God is a brother or sister or mother of Jesus. Whoever does the will of God is part of the family. Whoever knows the love of God, and shares the love of God, and lives the love of God, they are united in Christ Jesus.

Wesley said, "In all things love." That's where the unity comes from. It comes out of the love for our diversity. It comes from our lovingly listening – actively listening twice as much as speaking. May we celebrate our diversity. Out of our diversity, may we grow in unity. And in all we do, may we share the love of God – through our thoughts, through our listening, through our speaking, and through our actions; as we give God all the praise and all the glory.

Let us pray. . .

Lead us Lord.

Teach us to talk less and listen more.

Teach us to embrace our diversity.

Teach us to grow in our love of each other

as we grow in our love of you.

This we pray in your holy name.

Amen.

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