

Holy Humor Sunday April 28, 2019

[The sermon begins with an excerpt from a joke paraphrase of the Bible entitled, *God is Disappointed in You*, by Mark Russell.]

All I can do is speak my truth and see what happens. But first I want to acknowledge some unfunny things that happened this week. On Monday Peggy Schlosser died. And while she may be with Jesus enjoying the last laugh on the devil, the rest of us wish that she were still here with us. The other unfunny thing that happened was that the Judicial Council voted that much of the Traditional Plan that sought to punish clergy and churches that embrace the LGBTQ community was determined to be constitutional.

But in some ways, nothing has changed. The Traditional Plan succeeded in increasing the punishments on clergy who violate the Discipline and perform same sex marriages, but it failed to create a global system for punishing bishops who refuse to hold church trials for clergy who live their truth and act on their conscience. And the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops is in agreement that they will not hold such trials.

The Western Jurisdiction is living into the One Church Plan, the plan that failed to pass at the Conference in February but that we believe is closer to our Wesleyan values. So we can expect more fireworks at General Conference next year. I strongly suspect that we are seeing the beginning of the end of the United Methodist Church as we have known it.

But this is Easter season. And we are Easter people and we believe that every death is followed by new birth. It may be the beginning of the end, but I like to think that the Judicial Council's vote is also the end of the beginning. God is doing a new thing.

The Methodist movement in the US has survived at least 14 splits since its founding in 1784 and it will survive this one. The biggest split came over slavery in 1844. But even then the church didn't die. Quite the opposite. In the decades following the Civil War, we saw the greatest growth of Methodism since the days of John and Charles. In the 1870's we were starting a new church every day.

The Easter story says that there has to be a death before the resurrection. But between the death and the resurrection is an empty tomb. That's where we are. We are staring into an empty tomb, not sure of what is to come or what resurrection will look like. The first disciples didn't recognize their risen Lord until he spoke to them, or broke bread with them. We may not recognize the resurrected church for a while.

The angels told the disciples to go back to Galilee and there they would see him. That tells me that we have to go back to where we came from, to the core of our faith, to the truth that is ours and wait. Jesus will appear to us. Every day the path forward is becoming more clear for us.

This is what came to me as I walked the labyrinth at the Mercy Center in Auburn on the way home from Tahoe on Friday. So I'm going back to what I love about the Methodist Church and I'm not going to dwell on what makes me crazy.

The thing about Wesley that sold me in graduate school is that he could hold seemingly conflicting truths in creative tension. In the same way, he could hold people who had very different views in one loving community. What I love about Wesley is that he was a both/and rather than an either/or kind of guy. He said that we don't all have to think alike in order to love alike. I may not agree with you, but if your heart is as my heart is, give me your hand. Christians have many opinions but one faith. We have many different social and political commitments but one Christ. We love different people in different ways but we have one Lord who is above all and through all and in all.

Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." We are weeping for Peggy, we are weeping for our church, and our weeping may tarry for the night, but unimaginable joy is coming with the morning. I believe that one day we will all sit back and have a good laugh about this long fight in the church because we will know that God got us through it. We will tell

jokes because we know that the devil of division did not get the last word. The Lord of Love will bring us all back together and God will wipe every tear from our eyes and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Then we will all sit down at the Lord's table and have a party.

The upshot of all this is that God is doing a new thing. And if change is unsettling for you, you aren't alone. If only changing the church were as easy as changing a lightbulb. How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? None. The lights will go on and off at predestined times. How many Pentecostals does it take? Ten. One to change the bulb, and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness. How many Jehovah's Witnesses? Three. One to change the bulb and two to knock on your door to ask if you have seen the light. How many Episcopalians? Three. One to call the electrician, one to mix the drinks, and one to talk about how much better the old one was.

So how many Methodists will it take to change the lightbulb? No one really knows. For we are the people who say, "Whether your

light is bright, dull or completely out, you are loved. You can be a light bulb, a turnip bulb, or a tulip bulb. You are all welcome! We are having a church wide lighting service on Sunday. Bring a bulb of your choice and a covered dish.

Whatever is coming, there is only one thing you have to remember. Take it from Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians.

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