

Shiloh United Methodist Church

Ephesians 5:21-6:9
Mark 1:14-20

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Road to Shiloh: All at the Table

Earlier in this series I shared that I would include stories from our past. One of the sources I am using is Pastor Barry Padget who was the founding pastor of Shiloh. For those of you who don't know, before Shiloh met in this church building it started meeting in St. John's Lutheran Home up the road. Barry had this reflection about that time:

Every Sunday when we worshiped at St. John's Lutheran Home, we had to come early to set up for church. Moving the chairs into position and making sure it was ready to welcome people into the space. I remember a time after worship at St. John's, while I was putting everything away that it came to me that this was what church was all about, not a building but the people gathered for worship. When the people weren't there it was just a room. It was one of those things one should know but doesn't quite until one lives it.

I also remember that when we were in St. John's, the front row was always full. Apparently, it didn't really look quite like a church so it was okay to sit in the front. Interestingly, it took some years when we were finally in church building for people to no longer sit in the front row.

Today as we reflect on the deep reality that the road to Shiloh involves the people making up God's kingdom, I am going to take some time for us to reflect on the work of Martin Luther King Jr. and our continued challenges at making sure everyone is welcome at our table. In our church where we welcome everyone to communion each week, it is

important to our Christian practice to take note of where people in our world still feel excluded from our communities and in our country.

One time I remember sitting down to watch some of my home videos from growing up, I watched it on one of those VHS tape players, that very few of us have left in our homes, and that my kids only know about because I forced them to watch “school house rock.” As I was watching the videos I came across one section, a family Christmas Eve dinner, that I had to rewind to make sure I heard what I thought I heard. In it one of my relatives told a joke that involved the N-word, the word that some ridicule rappers for using, and has gotten people expelled from schools. My own relative said it loud and clear as a part of a clearly derogatory joke, even in my home growing up prejudice existed.

Later in my life I sat in a college lecture hall. I often sat in the front row of this older lecture hall, because the can lights on the ceiling dotted the center of class and usually resulted in me falling asleep. As I was listening to the lecture, the professor, a Russian immigrant, noted that often in communication the color of people’s skin can evoke responses, especially in areas that were primarily people of European descent. One of the students got very upset and said, “We don’t in my small town, that I come from. However, if someone of a darker skin color comes to town, we make sure to keep an eye on them.” I knew how prejudice this statement was, and it was as if this student proved my professors point. In our country, whether we like it or not, we still train our community and our children that people that are different can be dangerous.

When I first moved to Denver in 2008 I first was made aware of some of my own prejudice. Our 3rd day in Denver was during the summer. Crystal and I were hanging out with some friends. The idea came up to go to lunch and someone suggested we go find some BBQ. We found a place in downtown. The place was a bit of a walk from my friend’s house, but nothing unmanageable. I still didn’t know Denver, but I now know the neighborhood we were in is relatively safe. On this day in 2008 I was new to the city and nothing felt safe to me.

We made it to the restaurant fine and enjoyed our food. On our return a man started walking towards us. I remember distinctly feeling fear. The man's skin color was black. I have never been taught to fear other skin colors. As the man approached us my body language was clear as I turned and walked closer to Crystal. I was afraid and the man could clearly see it.

Then something unexpected he called me on it. He said something like, "You don't need to act like that just because I am black." I said something out of shame, "I wasn't. I just was hanging out." He said something disgruntled as he continued on. Crystal and my friends called me on it. I could feel the shame. I took on the role of someone who I can't stand to be around, someone who makes racist assumptions.

The truth is that day the restaurant's food was probably more dangerous to me than the man on the street. I learned that day that all of us are capable of being racist and causing harm, hatred, and violence towards people we don't know. Even when we are not meaning to. Our tradition and our Jesus call us away from this harm, but we are all capable of turning people away from our table. At the same time we are woven together with the ability to cause harm, we are also given the ability for grow beyond the grief and shame we feel, when we learn we are capable of such harm. Christ was trying to teach us this and this is the reason his life, death and resurrection are such an important thing for us to understand.

Our first scripture for today, comes from our study of Ephesians. It is a scripture that has its own baggage, because it has been used to keep people excluded from the table. This week I shared the passage with a group of people from our church, and their responses we spot on. They identified there are parts of the Bible that need to be put in context, and that sometimes we have to identify the message of truth in them, not take them at face value. They also identified, that these scripture have

been used to oppress some people, so in order to avoid the past I just describe we must tread lightly.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Common English Bible (CEB)

²¹ and submit to each other out of respect for Christ. ²² For example, wives should submit to their husbands as if to the Lord. ²³ A husband is the head of his wife like Christ is head of the church, that is, the savior of the body. ²⁴ So wives submit to their husbands in everything like the church submits to Christ. ²⁵ As for husbands, love your wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. ²⁶ He did this to make her holy by washing her in a bath of water with the word. ²⁷ He did this to present himself with a splendid church, one without any sort of stain or wrinkle on her clothes, but rather one that is holy and blameless. ²⁸ That's how husbands ought to love their wives—in the same way as they do their own bodies. Anyone who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ No one ever hates his own body, but feeds it and takes care of it just like Christ does for the church ³⁰ because we are parts of his body. ³¹ *This is why a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two of them will be one body.* ³² Marriage is a significant allegory, and I'm applying it to Christ and the church. ³³ In any case, as for you individually, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and wives should respect their husbands.

6 As for children, obey your parents in the Lord, because it is right. ² The commandment *Honor your father and mother* is the first one with a promise attached: ³ *so that things will go well for you, and you will live for a long time in the land.* ⁴ As for parents, don't provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord.

⁵ As for slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling and with sincere devotion to Christ. ⁶ Don't work to make yourself look good and try to flatter people, but act like slaves of Christ carrying out God's will from the heart. ⁷ Serve your owners enthusiastically, as though you were serving the Lord and not human beings. ⁸ You know that the Lord will reward every person who does what is right, whether that person is a slave or a free person. ⁹ As for masters, treat your slaves in the same

way. Stop threatening them, because you know that both you and your slaves have a master in heaven. He doesn't distinguish between people on the basis of status.

There are a few problems with this passage. 1. It puts people named slaves, children, and women in a place of submissiveness to anyone society puts in authority over them. 2. It has been used by some to keep people subject to laws that make some humans unequal to others. 3. There is some truth in the passage that can be easily overlooked, if not considered.

The first 10 words are what are key to this passage. "and submit to each other out of respect for Christ." This passage from Ephesians is asking us to be subjects of one another. We are called in this passage to step away from the principalities of this world, and allow as Christ calls us to be open to serving one another in respect for Christ.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. highlighted this well in a great work in which he wrote in the voice of Paul, writing to the American Christians of his day. A beautiful piece in which King calls us as Christians to consider how to be subjects of one another in respect for Christ in Paul's voice. I invite you to listen to this excerpt from King's speech.

But America, as I look at you from afar, I wonder whether your moral and spiritual progress has been commensurate with your scientific progress. It seems to me that your moral progress lags behind your scientific progress. Your poet Thoreau used to talk about "improved means to an unimproved end." How often this is true. You have allowed the material means by which you live to outdistance the spiritual ends for which you live. You have allowed your mentality to outrun your morality. You have allowed your civilization to outdistance your culture. Through your scientific genius you have made of the world a neighborhood, but through your moral and spiritual genius you have failed to make of it a brotherhood. So

America, I would urge you to keep your moral advances abreast with your scientific advances.

I am impelled to write you concerning the responsibilities laid upon you to live as Christians in the midst of an unChristian world. That is what I had to do. That is what every Christian has to do. But I understand that there are many Christians in America who give their ultimate allegiance to man-made systems and customs. They are afraid to be different. Their great concern is to be accepted socially. They live by some such principle as this: "everybody is doing it, so it must be alright." For so many of you Morality is merely group consensus. In your modern sociological lingo, the mores are accepted as the right ways. You have unconsciously come to believe that right is discovered by taking a sort of Gallup poll of the majority opinion. How many are giving their ultimate allegiance to this way.

But American Christians, I must say to you as I said to the Roman Christians years ago, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Or, as I said to the Phillipian Christians, "Ye are a colony of heaven." This means that although you live in the colony of time, your ultimate allegiance is to the empire of eternity. You have a dual citizenry. You live both in time and eternity; both in heaven and earth. Therefore, your ultimate allegiance is not to the government, not to the state, not to nation, not to any man-made institution. The Christian owes his ultimate allegiance to God, and if any earthly institution conflicts with God's will it is your Christian duty to take a stand against it. You must never allow the transitory evanescent demands of man-made

institutions to take precedence over the eternal demands of the Almighty God.¹

King's words are haunting as we consider Paul's scripture to be subject to on another, living this out does no promise to be easy.

At Shiloh, we are called to live this out. This road to Shiloh series begs the question of how we support all people who find the roundabout of faith, and how we open ourselves to serving them. The two banners on the wall and this beautiful runner on the alter are reminders of this call. The banners each contain our trinity, with the Holy Spirit outlined as a dove echoed on both banners. A scripture that remind us that we are more than we imagine, we are what God imagines. The silhouette of the church is a reminder that the church is more than a building, but the people. And below the cross are flowers, reminding us of Christ's commitment to this Kingdom, and ultimately his resurrection which overcame all doubt and death.

Our second scripture today I will read just the first two verses:

Mark 1:14-20 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁴ After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, ¹⁵ saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

And after Christ shared this news he called more of his disciples. Just as we are called by Christ to be disciples.

As I was finishing my work on this sermon I cam across a video I want to share with us. Gil Caldwell is a man I have met who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. Gil continues King's work wherever he can. After my experience in Denver, I remember sitting in front of the pulpit

¹http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_pauls_letter_to_american_christians.1.html

I preach from listening intently to every word Gil shared with the congregation I served, when he came to preach for us.

I invite you to watch this story:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AeVrH_3igzk

Here in this video is the power of the Christian community for all of us. The heckler, the joiner, the racist, the violent, the hurtful, and the ignorant all are created in God's image. We believe as Methodists that people can grow and are capable of change. The community helps us to know when we are any of these hurtful things and gives us the opportunity to learn to share God's love. We provide a space for people to grieve their mistakes and feel their shame, so we can grow into new life.

We are quite literally reconnected with God when we are able to grow past our fear. And resurrection comes after we grieve and feel shame of death, we are a people who embrace new life.

This week I invite you to consider where new life is springing up in you, where you feel called to be subject to others in our community who need to be welcomed at the table, and where you need to live through your own shame to be made more whole in your walk with Christ.