

Korean students at PSR – we're not in Korea. In my experience, that's true of most people you meet from some place who live somewhere else. Outliers tend to leave a place, and I was an outlier. I was vegetarian at the age of 11 in a county that single-handedly could support the American beef industry. I had other examples, but that's enough.

Regardless of your political leanings, if you grew up in a place, or you ever lived in a place, where you were different than most of the folks living there – you know what I mean. Has there ever been an aspect of you – down to your very being – that was not welcomed by those around you? Have you ever had the moment when no one would afford you grace? At such a time, in such a place, how do you be part of a community?

Call to uniformity

This morning Paul talks about the calling to Christian community. Community is at the very heart of who we are. We cannot know Christ except through each other. The apostles are *apostles* because they build communities, because their experience of the Resurrection necessitates community.

That community, along with sacrament, is the Body of Christ. The church. The people – us. Christ has no hands but ours, no feet but ours. So, if we are one Body, united – with one calling, one Lord, who is our all in all, then should we not be of one mind?

Different gifts

But... There's a "but" in there. In scripture this morning. Did you catch it? *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling... But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

That is each of us is called to one hope, but equipped differently – some as apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and some teachers... We should not underestimate the significance of this. I had a friend in seminary, a three-tour veteran of Afghanistan, and once, when we were talking about this passage, he said something profound. Another classmate said that this was like a military mission – people have different skills, but everyone is locked in uniformity. My friend said, "Son, have you served in the military? We may be in uniform, but there is not uniformity." That is, different assignments and different gifts make humans see any one situation differently.

On the field of battle, a soldier sees one thing, a medic another, a chaplain still another. And so, I can only conclude that with a diversity gifts, a diversity of roles in which we are to serve Christ, we cannot help but come with a diversity of ideas. A diversity of perspectives.

I said a bit about General Conference last week. General Conference last, but just to recap. General Conference is the world-wide gathering of The UMC that happens every four years. *Religion News* said it most pithily when they said, "The United Methodist Church" gathers again to fight about homosexuality. Funny – sure. Accurate – no. Really, that's about as much as we can expect of what passes as journalism these days.

Because you hardly have to scratch the surface before you realize that what's going on with The United Methodist Church is about much more than one issue – an issue that also happens to be a group of people. There is disagreement about the role of the church. About the mission/purpose of the church.

Some feel that our main job is to spread the gospel everywhere we can as fast as we can. Some believe that our main job is to speak truth to power and reform unjust systems. Some believe that our main job is

to speak the Good News to the poor through service and compassion. And still some believe that our main job is to care for each other, or to pass on the church to our children.

It's almost as if some of us called to be apostles and found new communities, some of us evangelists and spread the news, some pastors and teachers and some of us prophets. And honestly, that we could come around the table – which we believe to be an outward sign of God's grace – we could actually figure out how this gifts us.

There is little room for grace, however. I think that the fighting happens, that unresolvable conflict happens when we come to believe that our calling is the only calling, that our gifts are the most important gifts. That our truth is all that matters. And we lose the church – we lose community – any time we think that this is about *our* calling, *our* purpose, *our* preferences. That gifts we have are *ours*, our truth is ours.

Not uniformity, but unity

What is from Christ is of Christ. And Christian community – our church – means community through Christ and in Christ. It is nothing more and nothing less.

These are the words of theologian Bonhoeffer. In the next few weeks, you'll hear a bit more about him as we draw from his book *Life Together*. What do we already know about Bonhoeffer? Bonhoeffer knows – left safety of Union Theological Seminary New York to go to Germany. To speak truth. He was multiply gifted – he founded the Confessing Church that spoke the truth in fierce love against the Third Reich. He was a pastor and a teacher. And a martyr. And an evangelist of the Good News of the love of God for *all* people, of the unity of all things living because of the oneness of Christ. That is the truth.

For the church universal, and also just as much for The United Methodist Church, which managed to stay united for now. **(SLIDE: Bishops)** We are only united by the work of our bishops – by their wisdom in offering to lead through a two-year process in which they work, as the new chair of the Council of Bishops, Bishop Ough says, "Unity without unanimity." Unity without uniformity. Unity in diversity.

The reason the General Conference put the work of holding the church together to the bishops is because while there is great theological and political difference among the more than 70 people on the council of bishops, they actually meet together. They have built relationships over years and years. They have shared their truth, and they have done it with grace.

That is our calling. To be Christ in the world now does not mean that we will be of one mind. It means that we are the people who speak truth with grace. It is no small task. How easy is it to extend grace to the people we live, and slam down the truth on the people we judge. And yet the *real* body of Christ is one redeemed by blood. That is, that Christ speaks and *is* truth, and in doing gives of himself first and foremost. That's why the blood language, however uncomfortable we are with it, is important. Because that is the length to which we must go to express love and compassion.

God calls us to truth and grace. Justice *and* compassion. It is so simple task, but it is the work of the church, the Body of Christ.