

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

March 3, 2019
The Last Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 9:28-36
Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Today our liturgical calendar marks the Last Sunday after Epiphany or as many of you may call it - Transfiguration Sunday. That miraculous day on the mountain when Jesus shown in glory to Peter, James, and John. That day when God spoke from a cloud and said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" It tends to be a day we talk a lot about transformation – of our minds and of our hearts. Transformation of how we live our lives in accordance with how Jesus taught us to live. This morning is no exception. Let me start with this verse...

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15

I grew up in your typical 3 bedroom, 2 ½ bath home. It was a cape cod with brown wooden siding. There was a small galley kitchen and a breakfast room that opened into the den. There was also a modest dining room. We even had a 2 car garage. All in all, there were 7 rooms under our roof.

7 rooms. 7 rooms to share. 7 rooms to welcome. 7 rooms to show warmth and hospitality and love. And, I remember the day I realized that those rooms were only meant for certain people. At first, I started to be aware of a few harsh words about someone who looked differently than we did. Then, I heard a few off-color comments about someone based upon their religion. Sometimes, the words and phrases would clump together in entire ugly paragraphs about the single mother across the street or black family who moved in a few blocks away or the speculation about the two ladies a couple of doors down who said they were just roommates.

I remember the day I stood up to my dad for all of those ugly words – the words I no longer wanted to hear. We were sitting at the kitchen table. When I told him how wrong I thought that he was, he yelled. He yelled and pointed his finger and stood over me and accused me of being a bad daughter. His anger was so thick you could feel it. 7 rooms and so little space.

Our front door seemed to be shut tight. These words, these actions, these attitudes weren't what I had been taught to believe in church. I came to wonder how we were supposed to be living out this verse about our home serving the Lord when we only wanted to serve the Lord in certain ways and with certain people.

Maybe some of you have had similar experiences in your homes.

I saw this same verse from Joshua again this past week...On a letter written by David McAllister-Wilson, the president of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. It was written after the painful and divisive United Methodist Church Special General Conference in St. Louis. You

may have been following the story. Up for vote was the One Church Plan. A proposal within the worldwide Methodist church for marriage equality and the freedom for anyone, LGBTQ or straight, to be able to serve in fully ordained capacities within the Methodist denomination.

The proposal states on the official One Church Plan website: “The plan grants space for traditionalists to continue to offer ministry as they have in the past; space for progressives to exercise freely a more complete ministry with LGBTQ persons; and space for all United Methodists to continue to coexist without disrupting their ministries.” Traditionalists. Progressives. Coexisting.

The resolution was voted down.

And so, David McAllister-Wilson began his letter in response to the failed resolution with this verse...As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. He then stated, *“It may seem from news reports the issue was a call to full inclusion of all gender identities and sexual orientations. But it wasn’t even that. It was a debate about whether we can simply accommodate our differing views in one house with many rooms. Wouldn’t that have been a powerful witness to the world and this country if we had succeeded?”*

Traditionalists. Progressives. Coexisting. The accommodation of a diversity of views held within one house with many rooms.

One of the responses that has stood as a beacon of hope for those who have felt shut out, demeaned and disregarded by the vote came from a group of over 15,000 young people who in my mind got something all of the adults who voted against the resolution failed to see. Their statement went like this...

“We the young people of the United Methodist Church are not of one mind when it comes to inclusion of our LGBTQ siblings in Christ. And yet through working together, sharing stories, and worshipping side by side we have seen each other’s gifts and fruits for ministry! We have witnessed the incredible ways that God is working through each of us in our own unique contexts. We believe that if we are truly a body we need each other. We need one another, in all of our diversity- to fulfill our call to be the Body of Christ. We as the church need to stop the harm that is done when we debate one another’s humanity and worth, and focus on our shared mission to live into our primary identity as God’s children.”

By now you may be wondering why I am spending so much time this morning on the United Methodist Church. I am spending time on it for two reasons. The first is that we need to recognize that when votes of this nature move through the Christian church, it is painful for those in any denomination. Because when you are on the receiving end of this kind of exclusion it’s a very short path to wondering if you are still loved by God and if you are still love by your faith community.

And that leads me to the second reason we are spending time on this this morning...I want our members, especially our LGBT members and our members who have children or other family who are LGBT to know you will ALWAYS be welcome here. God loves you and Grace loves you. That is not up for vote.

We are fortunate that the Episcopal church as already moved through this debate. Do we all agree? No. And that is not the point. The point is that we have committed – Traditionalists and Progressives to coexist. To accommodate our diversity of views in one house as a body of Christ.

- In 1976, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church declared that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church”.
- In 2003, the first openly gay bishop was consecrated;
- In 2009, General Convention resolved that God’s call is open to all;
- In 2012, a provisional rite of blessing for same-gender relationships was authorized, and discrimination against transgender persons in the ordination process was officially prohibited;
- And in 2015, the canons of the church were changed to make the rite of marriage available to all people, regardless of gender.

Thanks be to God.

That doesn’t mean we all agree. It doesn’t mean that every member of our denomination or even this church understands or is comfortable with differing gender or sexual identities. It does mean, however, that we are committed to loving one another and making sure that each and every person can fulfill God’s call within their lives to love and marry whom they choose and to serve in whatever way God has called them to serve.

And more importantly, we state boldly as Episcopalians...that We believe that God loves you – no exceptions. That is what we believe a house that is truly serving the Lord should look like. So we say...come on in!

And we will pray fervently for the United Methodist Church as they move through their own process of transformation, transformation to open their hearts and their houses to each and every one of God’s children. To bring together traditional and progressive voices to say you are welcome here and you are loved.

Let us pray together the prayer for Unity of the Church from our Book of Common Prayer...

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace to acknowledge the dangers of our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And let us all say...*Amen.*