

Methodist Roots: Think and Let Think

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – August 11 2024

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Ecclesiastes 4:9-16; Romans 14:1-9; John 15:12-17

Reflection: Psalm 133

Greeting: Let us find encouragement in Christ, comfort in love, and sympathy for each other. Let us have our joy made complete in sharing how we think and having the same love. Let us be in agreement in living our lives in Christ Jesus and abandon our selfish desires. Let each of us act with humility, regarding each other with respect, helping each other as Christ has helped us. (Philippians 2)

Prayer: Lord, we ask that you remind us of your love that is there for all people. Help us to get along with each other because of your love. Remind us of how to act because we have been given the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank you that you are with us in all things, and that you have brought us together in this place so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Heavenly Father, watch over us. Let your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us. And may we celebrate the love and mercy found in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. It is with hope and faith we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore. (Psalm 133 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 133 and hear of how good it is to work together for the Lord. That the unity we find in God helps us to live in peace. That we are called in Christ to love each other and to do what we can to serve God together. How do you respond to God's invitation to unity in Christ? Do you lift up prayers asking for guidance and understanding? Who can you pray with this week so that you may strengthen each other in faith? What are the things that you do to share the love of Christ with others? How do you celebrate God's love and grace as part of your life? How can we live out our journey in Christ together?

Prayer: God, you are there for us before we know that we need you. Help us to remember your love as we work together in the unity of Christ to help one another. May you help us this day that we may remember your steadfast love and faithfulness. We come before you now with the joys and concerns that we share on this day. We turn to you now with the celebrations that we have spoken together. We turn to you with the worries that we have lifted up with each

other. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that you will lift us up in love that we may know your strength. Help us in our laughter and our tears and guide us in sorrow and rejoicing. And may we join together joyfully by faith to celebrate your presence with us in love, forever and always. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Ecclesiastes chapter 4, verse 9 through 16.

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other, but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken. Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who will no longer take advice. One can indeed come out of prison to reign, even though born poor in the kingdom. I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king; there was no end to all those people whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-16 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 14, verse 1 through 9.

Welcome those who are weak in faith but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat, for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on slaves of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it for the Lord. Also those who eat, eat for the Lord, since they give thanks to God, while those who abstain, abstain for the Lord and give thanks to God. For we do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (Romans 14:1-9 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 15, verse 12 through 17.

[Jesus said] "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." (John 15:12-17 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As we near the end of our Methodist Roots series, I wanted to look at something that John Wesley said. The more time I have had to think about it, the more important these words have become for me. He said that we should be able to think and let think. And the more that division creeps in and becomes more pronounced in every aspect of society, the more I feel drawn to his words. We may feel that every day we are presented with more and more dividing lines until we are finally standing alone. Which is never where we should be as followers of Christ. Wesley is quoted in the United Methodist Book of Discipline as saying, "as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think." This comes from Wesley talking about the character of a Methodist. Because he knew that it would be all too easy for people to think any disagreement would start to cause them to push away from each other. But he highlights that if those disagreements don't strike at the heart of faith, then we should be able to politely disagree. There are many issues that we can disagree upon that do not strike at the heart of our faith. But those issues are often leveraged by people who need divisions in order to hold onto power. This week and next week's messages will have some tie-in together, because next week we talk about the individual in the community, and we explore more about the importance of a community of faith. But I wanted to talk about this idea of think and let think because it helps us to think about how we are called to come together in Christ by God's grace.

The readings I chose for today are meant to highlight the ways that we are to overcome division and work together for God. I started with one of my favorite books of the Bible, Ecclesiastes. It is an interesting book to study because the questions that Ecclesiastes raises are ones that cause us to take a hard look at our faith and challenges us to think differently. In Ecclesiastes, we're given an image that two are better than one, for if they fall, one lifts the other up. That two people together can keep warm. That two can withstand one, and a three-ply cord is strong. And then there was this line that really drew me in. "Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who will no longer take advice." One of the problems we run into when we get too set in our own ways is that we are no longer able to take advice. We are no longer able to hear what others are saying and we are no longer able to learn. Because even if you aren't going to change your mind, we should always be able to hear other people speak of their experience. Knowing how others see things helps us to understand them and to love them. It also gives us a better picture of God, because it can broaden our horizons so that we have a better and bigger picture of God.

I think it's important that we be able to listen to each other, because too often our division comes from wanting to speak but never to hear. And Paul, in his letter to the Romans, talks about some of the ways that we can do each other a disservice with our inability to listen. Paul says that people with weak faith should be welcomed, but not with the hope of arguing with them. The example that he gives is those who feel they should only eat certain foods. Those who think eating everything is OK shouldn't pass judgement on those who decide only

certain foods should be eaten. At the same time, those who abstain from eating shouldn't judge those who do not. That we may be convinced in our own minds and not change our stance, but that we shouldn't restrict others in their choices. Paul notes that both of them give thanks to God. He notes that all who live with Christ and die in Christ are raised in Christ, and so are together in Christ, even if we think differently. Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that everyone needs to agree on everything simply so that there are never any differences. We instead think and let think because we often do have differences of opinion in diverse groups. The only reason we don't want any disagreement is because then we don't have to think. Paul's example can be applied to many issues, because the central point he is making is that people making decisions for themselves aren't interfering with you. If somebody decides to follow dietary restrictions as part of their faith journey, what is that to you? I like the example Paul uses because it highlights that it is a personal choice and not a central tenet of faith. It is people making choices for themselves, not forcing their personal choices on you. What I choose to eat doesn't change what is on your plate. Can we make recommendations in love? Sure. But they need to be without judgement or condemnation simply for being different. Because we can have honest, good faith discussions about why we do what we do. But doing things differently doesn't mean we are not together in Christ and they shouldn't change our faith.

We hear from Jesus in our gospel reading from John, his command is to love one another because we are friends in Christ. That we have been called to bear fruit in his name. The command he gives is to love one another. Now, I include this because the thing he doesn't command is that we agree with one another on everything. You may ask, "how can I love someone I disagree with?" I can love all sorts of people I disagree with, because I ask if my love is conditional or not. Christ gave love to me without agreeing with everything I thought, so maybe I can love without needing anything in return. As I always say, if you put two Methodists in a room, you'll find three opinions on something. But here's my main takeaway in all of this with this idea of think and let think. John Wesley knew that we are a diverse people with a diverse heritage. Methodists are people who think about their faith. But he didn't want us to throw each other out and cut each other off because we think differently on some things. He wanted us to be able to think about what our faith truly is and to think and let think in matters that don't relate to the core of faith. If you tell me that I shouldn't love my neighbor, we are going to have a problem, because that is central to my faith in Jesus. Jesus told me to love one another as he loved us. That his sacrifice was a sign of love to his friends. That we can understand all the law and the prophets when we love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. These points are central to how I live a life in Christ, but there are topics that are not.

Maybe we disagree about what the end times will look like. If we can agree that we get through them by the grace of God, then maybe we can hear each other out and think and let think. Maybe we disagree about what we think heaven will look like. Disagreeing about streets of gold isn't going to destroy the faith I have in my risen Savior. And I see it as no reason to not

celebrate Christ together. Maybe we disagree on which parts of the Old Testament are still relevant to our daily lives today. But do they interfere with our ability to worship God together? Maybe you think people shouldn't get tattoos, which is your right to believe. But do we then turn away people who do good in the name of Jesus because they have a tattoo? Does what we eat impact our ability to do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God? Maybe we disagree on what to wear, will that impact our ability to accept God's grace? Because it makes me ask what kind of disagreement we could have that would cut us off from God's grace and cut us off from each other. Because at the end of the day, I can think of many, many issues that we might have a difference of opinion on. At the same time, I can think of so much good we can do together in the name of Christ. So, if I have to choose whether or not those social issues divide us, I can think and let think.

Because we are better together than we are apart, and we are better together in Christ. Because we're stronger as a community of faith. It's like we heard in Ecclesiastes. When we are bound together in Christ, we can do more than we ever could apart. We can celebrate those things we agree on, like helping those in need. It doesn't matter what you and I eat if we can agree upon feeding those who are hungry. It doesn't matter if we disagree about what type of clothing we should wear if we can agree to clothe those who are in need. Because we have so many things we may disagree on, but so many things we have in common because of our love of God. Because we can come together to accept God's grace together. We can come together to strengthen each other by the Holy Spirit. We come together to build each other up in the name of our Heavenly Father. Because we can think and let think on all things not necessary for salvation. Because that diversity helps us to grow, and it helps us to understand God. Because it helps us to understand the bigger picture out there. And so, I pray that we can work together in Christ, remembering we are the body of Christ, redeemed by His blood. Because God's grace is there for all people. That we are here to do the good works we have been called to do, so that we may do no harm, we may do good, and we may stay in love with God. That even if we disagree on exactly what certain scriptures mean, we study them together because they draw us closer in Christ. And that it helps us to live out that call. That we may follow the command that Jesus gave us to love one another. Because if Jesus loves you, I can love you too. And in the name of Jesus we can think and let think. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Methodist Roots

We begin a series that looks at our Methodist heritage. "Methodist Roots" will be a six week look at the way that we follow Christ as United Methodists. We will be discussing the way that we live our lives in Christ, how we study, and how we interact with each other.

7/14: 3 Simple Rules

7/21: Reading Scripture

7/28: Grace for All

8/4: Good Works

8/11: Think and Let Think

8/18: The Individual in the Community

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Toledo UMC

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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