

“Decision-Making within the Community of Faith”

Scripture: Acts 6: 1-7

As we continue our journey through Acts and as we continue to discover where it is calling us as modern day disciples, we come upon this interesting passage about decision making in the early church. Luke is pretty honest with us readers. He tells us that the main conflict is between two groups because one group is feeling like their widows were not getting their fair share in the weekly food distribution program but in reality this conflict has come up because each of these groups is used to doing things their own way and now they have the task of figuring out how to be in community with one another, to share resources, to care for the “other”, and be a united church proclaiming the Kingdom of God, a big order for the early church, an order that once straightened out and figured out will allow the early church to focus on its mission: to proclaim the word of God. However, the funny thing about it is that in two thousand some years, I’m not sure that we as the Church have ever figured it out. Throughout our history, there have been splits and divisions, splits over big theological issues and divisions over what color the new carpet should be in the sanctuary. So regardless of these splits and divisions, whether the church has liked it or not, the church’s one task was and has

always remained. We are called to proclaim the word of God as the unified Body of Christ here on earth, no matter how easy or hard that task may be.

So as I was preparing this sermon this week, I couldn't help thinking that this passage doesn't really speak to us as Midway Christian Church. It is not like within our own congregation, two groups such as Disciples Women and the youth, are arguing over something and causing splits and divisions in our church. So where is the word of God for us as Midway Christian? We are a pretty healthy congregation, no major or minor conflicts threatening to tear us apart. So what do we do as modern day disciples with this text about decision making and conflict in the church?

All we have to do is look at the first line of the text to know that Luke is giving us a hint about how this text intersects with our lives as modern day disciples. "Now during these days, when the disciples were increasing." From this one line, we know all we need to know. Something is up. There is growth going on in this new church start which is great but this new growth also has brought changes. And as we all know and have experienced in our own lives and in our own church, change is not always easy.

The most difficult thing about change in the church is the fact that we know that we need to change so that we can remain relevant and open to where God is calling but we will admit it is not something we like to do. The word change can be

a bad word in the life of the church. Any time change is mentioned, immediately there is fear. There is worrying. We begin to wonder what is being taken away or what are we going to lose. Any time change is brought up, There are also questions that come up that may or may not be answered to everyone's satisfaction. And although we don't like to admit it, sometimes change brings out our not so pretty stubborn side. Sometimes when there is change, we dig in our heels, bury our heads in the sand, and hold tight to what we know, whether it works or not.

Now please hear me say that change for the sake of changing is not always a good thing but as Luke points out, sometimes there are circumstances that are out of our control like new growth that brings change to our churches whether we like it or not.

Now I will admit that we are not necessarily busting at the seams with new member growth but I still say that there has been growth in this church, which in itself has brought a number of changes to our church. We are having different conversations than we were a year ago. We know that we can't operate like we have always operated because we just don't have the membership numbers like we did at one time. And as I lived with this text this past week, I couldn't help but think about all the other changes, good and bad, that we have experienced over the past year, over the past three years, over the last ten years as Midway Christian Church.

One of the great things that has always brought us comfort as members of Midway Christian Church is that we know regardless of how long we've been gone, whether it was for a weekend or for years, that on Sunday mornings, we can come to 123 East Bruen Street and be at Midway Christian Church. We know that we can walk into this sanctuary, find our pew, and be at church, be at a place that has centered us and connected us with God along our faith journey. But even now, although the sanctuary looks the same and is essentially the same as it has been for years, there have been some changes. Faces that used to be here are no longer here and new faces have joined our community of faith. We are no longer that church we remember from 30 years ago, 10 years ago, even a year ago. There is new technology with our sound system that allows us to record our Sunday services, burn them to CD's, and then these CDs are sent to our homebound members. Now the community of faith that worships with us is not just made up of those of us gathered on Sunday mornings. We have broadened our circle of worship to beyond these four doors. Our worship goes beyond just what happens here on Sunday mornings. And that's not all. We've added the Chalice Praise hymnals to our singing choices this past year and have included some new songs to our worship. And there is a newer communion set that is lighter and easier to manage for some of us with older hands.

So even though we are sitting in our same pews, finding peace and comfort in the ritual and routine of worship, there have been changes in the place that has always stayed the same, changes, whether we like it or not, which may have brought some discomfort and uneasiness for us..

And it is not just in the sanctuary that we have seen changes in our church. Over the past year, we have been holding some conversations that have needed to have happen for the last ten years but we as a church were never able to have them because we were not always in the most stable of places. There was always a change in ministerial leadership. There was always something else that needed our attention. And if we are honest with ourselves, it was just easier to do things the way we had always done them. So even though we are trying to operate the same way we have always done, there have been some changes that have brought a little discomfort and a little uneasiness. And as we have held these conversations, some of that discomfort and uneasiness has come to the surface, and we are realizing that we are living in what I like to call “creative tension, which is not the most comfortable of places, I’ll admit that but it is a great place to be as we rediscover the creative nature of God. The great thing is that these uncomfortable conversations have helped us name some of our fears and our worries and have helped us start to discover who we are as Midway Christian Church. As we have continued with the Surfing the Edge process, The guiding team has heard questions

like: Are we going to stop being Midway Christian Church just for the sake of change? The answer is no. Are we going to get rid of our traditional worship service? The answer is no. Are we going to completely ignore the needs of our members just for the sake of the larger community? The answer is no. We are not changing just for the sake of changing. We are rediscovering what makes Midway Christian Midway Christian. We are realizing that God has given us all unique gifts as members of Midway Christian Church to build up the Body of Christ here on earth. We are rediscovering our call to be the community of faith that God has called us to be.

Our Surfing the Edge conversations have also brought to light areas where the breakdown of our infrastructure has prevented us from doing just that. We as a congregation voted to put aside our bylaws but have not figured out how to be the “church” in this new reality so now people are wondering about their roles as elders, as deacons, as Board members, as members of Midway Christian Church. Great conversations that we need to have so that we can become the community of faith that God has called us to be.

Conversations, differences, and transitions that all boil down to one word: Change. And we are not so sure that we are comfortable with these changes. We will admit that we are uneasy. We know that we are asking questions that may or

may not have answers, questions that may or may not be answered to everyone's satisfaction and we are not sure that we are okay with that possibility.

As Midway Christian Church, we are living in a time of change, a time of transformation, a time of creative tension as we struggle what it means to be the church God is calling us to be.

And that is where the good news of our passage comes in! Luke tells us that even the apostles didn't have all the answers during the early church's time of transition and change. They just knew that they couldn't do everything and be everything to everyone. So they turned to God for guidance. They listened to the word of God for leadership. They came together and had conversations with the larger community. The disciples realized that it was going to take everyone sharing their unique gifts to help build up the Body of Christ here on earth. The disciples, during this time of creative tension, never forgot that the most important thing and the understanding that give their calling meaning was that they were called to proclaim the Kingdom of God and reflect God's love to all of God's children at all times. So they did a little decision making. They got their house in order. They had the uncomfortable conversations without fear. And the best thing about it was that during this time of transition, during this time of change, during this time of creative tension, the church grew, the people grew in their relationship with God, and most importantly, the Word of God spread!

And that is exactly what we as Midway Christian Church are called to do as well during our time of transition, change, and creative tension. As minister, I won't promise that I know all the answers. All I know is that I cannot be everything to everyone. I also know that the sign outside our door does not say Heather McColl Christian Church. It says Midway Christian Church and our primary task as Midway Christian Church is to embrace our calling to proclaim the Kingdom of God and reveal the love of God to all of God's children at all times.. We just need to get a few things in order so that we can fully focus our energies on doing so. Because the great part of having these transforming, changing, and uncomfortable conversations is that it is very evident that God is calling us to do some amazing things, things we have never tried before, things that could change how we look and function even more, things that are so life-giving that we know that it can only be God who is giving us these visions!

And so as Midway Christian Church, we are like the early church and the disciples and are in a time of transition, a time of change, a time of creative tension. Fears and worries will come along and we will have questions. And instead of shutting down, we will continue to listen to the voice of God and where it is calling us as a community of faith. We will continue to have the uncomfortable conversations and discern what is best for the church. We will always remember to center ourselves in prayer because we know that this is not

our church. It is God's church. We are just invited along to experience a small part of God's Kingdom here on earth. During this time of life-giving and yes, frustrating creative tension, we will watch in wonder as the word of God continues to spread, bring healing and wholeness, bringing grace and peace, bring new life to all corners of God's creation.

The good news that we must always remember is that our primary task as Midway Christian Church is to proclaim the Word of God. So whether we are in board meetings talking about budgets or brainstorming new mission ideas, all of our decisions should reflect our call to proclaim the word of God. Whether we are serving at the table as elders and deacons, or serving at the tables of our community dinner, all of our decisions should reflect our call to proclaim the word of God. Everything we do and the decisions that we make as Midway Christian Church should and must reflect the Word of God for the people of God, a word of love, a word of hope, and a most importantly a word of grace.

For us to become the community of faith that God is calling us to be, we know that we must and will make some decisions, no matter how uncomfortable they may be but the good news is that it is not all up to us. God is leading us and is a part of our conversations. God is guiding us and is a part of our decision making in our congregation. God is renewing us and is a part of our time of creative tension.

So let the changes whatever they may be come because we know that God is in charge and God is calling us to become the church that God created us to be.

May we always remember this calling as we make decisions in and for our church. Amen.