

“Holy Moment: Connection with Historic Second Christian Church”

Galatians 3: 26-29

We continue our Lenten journey today by taking a look at another holy moment for this particular community of faith...that moment being our connection with Historic Second Christian Church. As many of us may know, Historic Second Christian Church is an African American Disciples of Christ church here in Midway. They meet on Smith Street in a building which was built in 1906.

Historic Second Christian Church has long and proud tradition of sharing the good news within our community. It holds the claim to be the earliest known African American church founded this side of the Mississippi. Usually our congregation and Second Christian worship together on Pentecost and on other various occasions to celebrate our connection as brothers and sisters of faith.

Yet before we go too much more in depth about our connection with Historic Second Christian and how this connection stills shapes how we live out our mission and ministry as Midway Christian Church, I want us to back up a little bit. I want us to spend a little time with our text, these few well known verses from Galatians.

At first glance, this text seems pretty simple. It speaks to our very identity as Christians. These verses call us to place Christ as the very center of our being. It

talks about how this very act has implications for the ways we live out our faith as Disciples of Christ. No longer will we see each other based on the labels this world provides and demands. But rather we will see each other, we will see everyone as Beloved Children of God, made in the image of God. Sounds good, right?

This is usually when we sing Kum Ba Ya in worship, go home able to feel good about ourselves, thinking that we are all living out our call to reconciliation here and now. After all, Midway Christian professes all means all, all are welcome and invited to come to God's Table, All are embraced as God's own. All are welcome here.

This sermon seemed simple enough at the beginning of the week and to be honest, that was my plan. That is where I intended for this sermon to go....except the Spirit of God had other plans. It helped me realize that this is only part of the narrative. The story goes beyond this. The story of our connection with Second Christian Church calls us to realize that there is more work to be done, that the work of reconciliation is often messy, difficult and pushes out of our comfort zones. Yet as disciples of Christ, this is the story we are called to share.

It all started when with the help of the Spirit, this one commentator destroyed everything for me. He took away my illusions. He broke down the idealized narrative I often tell. When discussing this text from Galatians, this one

commentator made me face reality by simply saying.... “Remember this call to be one in Christ where there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, where there is no male and female, this call to reconciliation was beginning to be lived out within Paul’s churches but by no means was it ever fully realized.”

Let me say that again... “Remember this ideal of all of us being one in Christ began to be lived out within Paul’s churches but by no means was it ever fully realized.” I’m just going to let that sit with us for a moment....

When we sit with this commentator’s words for a bit, we realize that something is missing from the conversation. That one phrase, “by no means was it ever fully realized” leaves off an implicit piece. It leaves off the part which says.. “Nor is it being realized now.” It is this piece which changes everything about the story we need to tell as Midway Christian.

Here’s why I say this: We have all heard the MLK statement where he lifted up the fact that during his life time the 11 o clock hour on Sunday mornings was the most segregated hour of the week. Unfortunately this statement still remains true today. Sure I will admit that the number of multi cultural, and multi ethnic congregations is on the rise but they are by no means the norm. For the most part, in 2018, a lot of the congregations with our nation are filled with people who think alike, who act alike and certainly who look alike.

Now I fully admit at this point in the sermon I have moved from preaching to meddling. I can only blame this one commenter, who I am sure would turn around and blame Paul. Because within these verses, Paul is doing what Paul does best...making us mad. He is reminding us that Gospel living, living which center itself in the values of the Kingdom of God, values such as love and grace, values such as acceptance and reconciliation, Paul is remind us that Gospel living is never easy. It is complicated. It is messy. Within these few short verses, Paul is reminding us that the Gospel message given to us by Jesus Christ offends us more often than it ever comfort us.

You see, as people not used to Paul's blunt and often harsh way of speaking, we tend to miss that Paul's words are always a double edge sword. On the surface, they look good but in reality, Paul's words make us angrier than we would like to admit. Think about it...That's why he was always getting run out of town on his journeys. He would come into town, find some place to preach, usually the synagogue, and begin to preach. It usually started out okay for Paul...that is until he took it upon himself to point out all the ways the community was not living out its call as disciples of Christ. The community would get angry and run him out of town or jail him. But Paul never backed away from the very difficult part of his call...being a prophetic voice for the life changing identity we take on when we

embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior, sort of like what he is doing in our text here and now.

In our text today, Paul reminds us that as the Body of Christ, as the larger community of faith, distinctions have no place. We are all one in Jesus Christ. There are no labels to separate and divide. Yet...yet...if we are truly going to say, we are one in Christ, then, as disciples of Jesus, at some point, we must move beyond just allowing them to be words we simply say. We need to turn them into actions which bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

Now this is where it gets complicated. In order to do that, in order to move beyond just words to actions which bring healing and wholeness, we as disciples of Christ must realize that the reasons we give for holding on to our distinctions, the excuses we give for not reaching across the aisle, the reasons we give for staying divided by race, gender and ethnicity are just that...excuses. They have no value or meaning when it comes to the larger conversation of reconciliation. They are simply empty words given to maintain the status quo. If we are going to take our call of oneness in Christ seriously and tell a different story, a story that is not based on labels or division, then it is time for us to realize these reasons and excuses no longer have a place within the Body of Christ.

Or let me say it this way...Since we are talking about a difficult conversations and since I have moved from preaching to meddling, it seems only fair to share with everyone a story about a time when I offered excuses and insufficient reasons instead of answering the call for reconciliation. It happened at our church one summer a few years ago. A youth group from Illinois had come to the area to experience Disciples history. They were here to see Cane Ridge in Paris KY where Disciples honor their meager beginnings. They were here to see Transylvania and Midway College. And of course, they wanted to stop by Midway Christian Church as this congregation is steeped in Disciple history...probably not the history we want to admit since it lead to a split between the Christian Churches and the Churches of Christ over music in worship...but I digress...that's another story for another day.

So one afternoon this youth group shows up wanting a tour of the church, asking about some of the history of congregation, wondering about that guy in the window over there, asking why Pinkerton is there and Jesus is over there....all good questions I tried to answer the best I could. Then their leader asked me about Second Christian Church. She wondered if it was possible to see that particular congregation. I shared that they were a small congregation with a bi-vocational minister so honoring that request may be difficult.

We talked a little bit more and then she asked the question....She asked, "Since this congregation and Second Christian seem to be small congregations, have you all ever talked about joining together as one community? I said, I think the idea had been tossed around in the past but nothing recently. I think I said something to the effect that of the two buildings, our church building and Second's, our building was in better shape, but not much. And if we ever actually joined congregations, my guess is that we would come together in the one building which needed less work.

Then she turned and looked at me. I will never forget this moment. She simply said, "You do realize that in order for the two of you to create one congregation and come together as one, both of you will have to sell your buildings." Immediately I said...That will never happen. To this day, that conversation and my response haunts me. It is almost as if in that moment, I could hear the cock crow three times as I watched idly by as they lead my Savior out to die.

Please again hear me say that I am not standing up here, pretending that I have all the answers to this very difficult, to this very messy call to reconciliation which Paul challenges us with today. What I do know is that in talking with Brenda Jackson this week, Second Christian Church has a very different narrative and memory than we do when it comes to the founding of their church. Their

founding story begins in 1832, long before this congregation ever existed. Second Christian Church's narrative tells of a former slave turned preacher who grew their early church to over 300 members, eventually moving the congregation from a log cabin to their present location now....while Midway Christian Church's side of this narrative tells of L. L. Pinkerton, in seeing how the slaves who worshipped with their masters didn't have an equal voice in membership, urged the church leadership to help create a separate congregation for the slaves at that time.

Now I don't know which narrative is true or if there is truth on both sides. But I do think that this dual narrative concerning the link between our two congregations shows that there is still work to be done. It shows that it will be complicated work, messy work. It shows us that it is work which calls us to see beyond the simple and easy solutions, and invites us to embrace the often times difficult call to become one in Christ.

Again, please hear me say that I don't have all the answers. It is my hope that this Lent, as we take the time to listen to the stories of our faith, as we listen to our narrative as Midway Christian Church, we embrace our call to tell a different faith story, a faith story which celebrates God's life changing, life giving actions, a faith story which more often than not will offend us rather than comforts us.

It is my hope that by listening and sharing our story as Midway Christian Church, we begin the journey of becoming the community of faith God created and calls us to be.

So today and all days, may we remember that what we do here in worship, in mission, in fellowship, in study as Midway Christian Church is not just some story. It is not just history. Our narrative as Midway Christian Church, as people of faith, more importantly as disciples of Christ, is about how love and hope came into being through Jesus Christ and transformed the world. It is the story of how our everyday lives are intertwined with the holy and sacred. It is a story about how we are transforming into the people of hope, the people of love, the people of WELCOME God calls us to be so that the Kingdom of God comes to life more and more here on this Earth. So Midway Christian Church...This is Us, telling our story as the people of God. Amen.