

This morning is world-wide Communion.

As a Pastor, I yearn for the day when all the world hungers and thirsts to gather at the One Table of GOD! **My first fear**, is that IF finally after 2,000 years all of the churches of the world joined together in sharing the Sacrament of the Last Supper, will the world care!? The Sunday after September 11th, Sanctuaries around the country were filled with people searching for answers to their fears, and the following Sunday was the worst attendance on record, because people did not hear what they needed and wanted to hear. That our human world is broken and yet there is hope.

What is the importance of all the world's churches reading these passages and serving one another?

My 2nd fear is that when Non-denominationalists and Catholics, Presbyterians and Baptists, Unitarians, Lutherans and Episcopalians attempt to plan something together, HOLY COMMUNION could, like the HORSE designed by a Committee, come out looking like a Camel! In this case with The Body of Christ painted by Picasso, having an enlarged head for Presbyterians, Mystic Eyes, enlarged heart for Methodists, 18 pair of hands and feet!

This morning the Lectionary designed by the Vatican, gave all the churches of the world the 4 Bible passages used as Call to Worship, Call to Prayer, and Scriptures. All 4 of which are about AUTHORITY, which with Labor Strikes among all the Writers and Actors versus Studios in California, among the Auto Workers in Big 3 Manufacturers, our Government facing shut-down, and the Democrats and Republicans each dismissing the last several Presidents, AUTHORITY is a relevant topic. The Exodus passage about Moses' Father-in-Law Jethro instructing Moses to DELEGATE Authority, means that this is not a new topic.

According to Matthew, Jesus was having a Day. On Sunday, he had been paraded into Jerusalem with people cheering. But when he got to the Temple, he recognized it was already too late, and he wept. Monday he went to a Fig tree for figs and there was no fruit, so he cursed, and the tree died!

Jesus entered the Temple grounds, where the Pharisees challenged "BY WHAT AUTHORITY DO YOU SAY & DO THE THINGS YOU DO?" This was not going to be a good day! In their question, we have to separate issues of **AUTHORITY from POWER.**

Over the years I have served 6 terms a total of 18 years on the Presbytery's Commission on Ministry, dealing with congregations wanting to leave the denomination, fire their Pastor, Ministers who strayed outside the bounds, and churches seeking to call a new Pastor. **Nearly all conflicts become questions of POWER.** The Pharisees say "By what authority?" but what they are really stating is: We who have Power never gave you Authority to do this! Who are you, to come to the Temple at Jerusalem and Teach and Preach and Heal? Ministers instinctively play a game, I am certain it also takes place in other professions: "What Denomination are you? Where did you go to Seminary? Where have you worked? Whom do you know?" In Green Valley the routine question we all ask strangers is "What State are you from?"

The foolishness of their challenge is that there need be no Power-Games in churches! All power comes from GOD! The spouses of Elders and Deacons know that individually Deacons & Elders have no authority, only as the Board of Deacons or as the SESSION do they. Even as Pastors, our only ability is in Moderating meetings, Visitation and Teaching. Even celebrating the Sacraments, we need to have an Elder or Deacon with us, we have no power on our own. I guess the other authority we do have is in PREACHING & WORSHIP... I had someone come to me once saying, that they were taught to be careful around Pastors, because we had the last word about them at Funerals!

SO having been asked a question, Jesus asks the leaders a question: "By what authority did John Baptize?" John the Baptist lived in the Wilderness, while his father had been a Temple Priest, John's Father & Mother had died leaving him an Orphan at any early age. SO if the Pharisees said John had AUTHORITY, John had

the same Authorization as Jesus. AND yet, John the Baptist was a folk hero that all Galilee, even Pharisees, Sadducees, Tax Collectors and Roman Soldiers came to him to be Baptized. John was Martyred by King Herod. So if they said he had NO AUTHORITY, the people would challenge them for discounting JOHN.

I referred to 4 Scriptures, because in Matthew Jesus gives us a two-fer. Jesus then tells a PARABLE. In the Monday Bible Reflections this last week we read the Parable of The FATHER who had two Sons in LUKE 15 commonly known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Elder Son. Ironically that is really a Parable about the FATHER, whom we identified as being GOD; where in this Parable again the FATHER is GOD, but the Parable is about the contrast of the 2 Sons. One who says he WILL do what is needed/ does not; the other who appears to NOT be faithful/ yet does the Father's work!

There has been a mantra the last few months, "WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WHEN PASTOR DIANE RETIRES?" Which while understandable, is the wrong question! What we desperately need to confess, what should have been said long ago is that "When our Church went through Trauma, our Associate Pastor led the congregation in Faith & Prayer, she demonstrated Fidelity and Trust when the Body of Christ that is the church was broken, and living out the death, burial and resurrection of a Pastor. We are eternally grateful" and there is a committee at working planning a celebration for when seasonal residents return! The 2nd message, I want to leave you with today, is that **AUTHORITY is interwoven with INTEGRITY.**

The subtlety of the passage about Jethro and Moses, is that Jethro recognized that by Moses being central, the leader was able to know and understand the cares and concerns of the whole community, while at the same time needing to delegate responsibilities SO AS TO NOT WEAR OUT THE PEOPLE OR THEMSELVES. ***One of the problems of our church in the past, named repeatedly, was confusion of the roles of Pastors, Staff, Elders, Deacons, and others. We do not need power groups taking over, we need volunteers.***

I witnessed something wonderful this week, as a couple of people came forward out of the blue and volunteered to lead responsibilities. We are going to need many others to carry on the great work being done, and they did not just take these upon themselves, they asked if they could lead Pastoral Care Ministries! The church is not any one individual, it is all of us working together as the Body of Christ.

Finally, there is a problem with the passage about Moses and the Rock. **According to Exodus**, they left the Desert going toward the city of Rephidim, and walking through desert the people are dying of thirst. So GOD instructs Moses to take the Staff GOD had had him use, and go to the place GOD would show him, using the staff to strike the rock and water would satisfy the people. Moses Goes to where GOD shows him, strikes the Rock when GOD says, and water does come forth! Moses names the place MASSAH & MERIBAH, the Hebrew Words for GOSSIP & COMPLAIN. The problem comes that in **the Book of Numbers**, the people are again thirsting, so Moses thinks he knows what to do, Moses takes the staff and goes to the Rock at MASSAH & MERIBAH and strikes the stone a second time. AND for this, GOD punishes Moses, that Moses shall not live to enter the Promised Land. What did Moses do wrong? The people complained, he took the Staff, he struck the rock... The difference is that the first time, GOD had told him to do so, GOD had told MOSES when and where to strike. The second time, Moses took it upon himself without GOD.

What a witness it would be, if this day, in all the churches of the world, We/The Church recognized and affirmed that POWER GAMES are pointless, Living our lives only for ourselves is pointless, because all POWER and AUTHORITY COME FROM GOD. Let us live with INTEGRITY! We are not so many separate Churches/people, we choose to submit ourselves to give up control to be One Body, the Body of Christ at The One Table, and LIVE IT.