

January 22, 2017  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23

Called to be Different and the Same

Bob and Mary, today, you are being installed, and Tom, you are being ordained and installed as ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church USA.

This is an important day for us as the church. This event, the blessing of our leaders, is a big deal even in our little congregation because Jesus tells us that little is big; that small is mighty. That the least are the greatest in the Kingdom of God. And you, Bob and Mary and Tom, you will help us be the best little church we can be. And you'll do that, it says in our Book of Order, by discerning God's Spirit and governing God's people.

But wait, there's more to your new job as a ruling elder besides discerning and governing. Just listen to the other things the Book of Order says: ruling elders are to lead and strengthen and nurture; to measure the fidelity of the congregation to the Word of God, and to do all of that with compassion and wisdom and maturity. We know you can do this. And we know God has called you to this. And as you begin this work, we want you to remember two things. Just two things, that

will help you discern and nurture and lead and govern. That will help this church be the best church it can be; two things. As ruling elders, you've got to help us be different. AND you've got to help us be the same.

Today our scriptures tell us to be both of these things. That you and I and all who follow Jesus, must be different and we must be the same. And let's start with how we must be different because that is what we are meant to be. We, as the church, are called to be different than the world around us. We are called to tell a different story about who we are and why we are here. We are called to have different economics than the consuming enslavement of Egypt and Pharaoh. We are called to have different ideals than the power-hungry empire of Rome and Caesar. God's Kingdom is a different kind of Kingdom. The Lord we serve is a different kind of Lord. His way is not the way of the world, the way of wealth and privilege. And his church is not a church like that either. It is not a fan club. Or a volunteer club. Or a place to serve our own interests or the interests of our customers. We are here to serve God's interests. We, as the church are different, because we are the church. And our

mission is God's mission. Our work is God's work, to love others and this creation so much that we will give our lives for it. The church is here not for itself, to hoard God's blessings and keep them as our own, but to give those blessings away.

We have got to be different than the world. Because we are called to be different. Because like Peter and Andrew and James and John, we must be different and leave everything behind to follow Jesus. Like those first disciples, we must leave behind our lives as they were before. The disciples left behind their boats, their nets, their families, their livelihoods. Jesus came and interrupted them. He told them that the Kingdom of Heaven was near. And that everyone and everything, the whole world, would be different. Jesus interrupted them and their same old, same old routines. He interrupted life as usual. He interrupted the head-down, just 'going through the motions' way things were. And he said, don't you want things to be different?

On Monday at our Dr. Martin Luther King Jr service, we had a discussion about the needs and challenges in our community. And at the end, one of our neighbors spoke up and said, "You know, you ministers

talk a lot about wanting things to be different, but after this discussion tonight, I'm still a black person going out into a white person's world. So where do we go from here? How are things going to be different?" It seemed to me like an interruption of the Holy Spirit, a reminder, that we can talk about following Jesus and about being different, but there are things we have to do, too. Real things we have to change or leave behind so that there can be justice and understanding for everyone. So that together, we can be the beloved community; and people will say, "would you look at that? That must be what the Kingdom of God looks like." So, Bob and Mary and Tom, how is Jesus interrupting us? And what do we need to leave behind in order to follow him?

Jesus is calling us to repent and change and leave our old lives behind. To believe in a new kingdom. To believe in resurrection. To believe that things can and should be different. And that maybe, just maybe, Jesus can use different people to get that done.

Maybe we have gotten the message over time that to follow Jesus we all have to be the same. We all have to have the same likes and dislikes. We have to have the same faith experience, the same kind of conversion

story or the same born again belief. To be a Christian, we have to be the same as all the other Christians out there. But Jesus never said that his disciples had to be the same. He never even implied it. In the scriptures we see that the disciples were all different; from different backgrounds and with different personalities and ideologies. Jesus talked about his different sheep in other folds that we don't know about. Disciples are all different, and that seems to be what Jesus prefers. So it's OK to be different You, Tom, and Mary and Bob, you are different from each another. And as ruling elders, none of you will be like any other ruling elder. Each of you will not do this work like anyone else. You will do it as God has called you to do it. You have got to be different. You have got to be you and we will be grateful for that.

When you put together a tool chest, you don't fill it with screwdrivers. No, you need different tools; you need pliers and wrenches and wire cutters and a saw and a hammer and a tape measure and maybe a big roll of duct tape. And in the kitchen, you don't stock the pantry with one kind of thing. Unless you are on some crazy fad diet. No, you make sure you have all kinds of stuff. Flour and sugar and salt and eggs and milk

and baking soda and butter and chocolate and my, oh, my, doesn't that sounds like a good cake? With one kind of ingredient, one kind of tool, you can't do much. You can't make much. We all have to be different. As leaders, be different. Recognize what you do well and what others can do well, and celebrate the differences. If your gift is being quiet, don't try to be loud. If your gift is speaking, then don't stay silent. Your gift is analyzing. Your gift is laughing. Your gift is loyalty. Your gift is protectiveness. Your gift is building or healing or being sensitive. That's your gift. Embrace it. Use it. Put it to work because that's why God gave it to you. But, don't expect others to have the same gift. Don't expect others to see things the way you do or to feel the same urgencies. Don't expect others to be the same. When you see something that needs to be done, when you feel passionate about something, that's YOUR call being activated. You are who you are and we are all different for a reason.

Jesus called Peter and Andrew and James and John. And Jesus has called you, Tom and Mary and Bob to be different. And to help us, as the church, be different in a world that needs to be different. In a world that

needs compassion and understanding and love. They need to see that we can be different and still believe in one another.

That's because we are also called to be the same. Yes, we are different in skills and abilities and background, but we are the same in our humanity, in our need for love and grace. In our need for hope. In our need to belong to something bigger than ourselves. We, as the church, have a different story than the world around us but we got to have the same story here together. The same story that's been our story since the beginning. The same story that God created this world and created us to take care of it. The story that we are not perfect, but God so loves us anyway. The story that God wants to be with us and nothing, not ignorance or rudeness or rejection or betrayal or even death can stop God. God never gives up on us. God is faithful. It's the same story, in the Bible, over and over again.

People like to talk about how different things are now. How divided and fractured we are. And it's worse now than it's ever been. And I totally understand if you feel that's true and you are worried about the state of the world. But division is nothing new. The barriers and chasms between

people, between us and God, it's nothing new. Just look in the Bible. Look and see that since the very beginning of time, we have been in conflict with each other and with God. We have divided ourselves up in as many ways as you can possibly imagine. We have broken our families and our friendships and our communities. Conflict is everywhere in all times and all places. Even in the church. Take the church at Corinth for example, where the apostle Paul's letter that we read from today was directed. Paul was not writing to the Corinthian church because everything was perfect there and they were an example of peace and harmony. No, he was writing because the church in Corinth was not being a good example. Because they had divided themselves up into this group and that group and the other group over there.

"I'm with Apollos. Well, I'm with Cephas. Well, I'm with Paul." Have you ever known a church to do that? To quarrel and fight about who belongs, and who is better, and who is truly faithful? It happens, doesn't it? Wherever there are people, there are going to be problems and miscommunications and hurt feelings. Even in the Church way back then, people were still people. And they still wanted to compete and

argue and segregate. And Paul's words are for us today as much as they are for people back then. "Has Christ been divided?" Has he been broken up into pieces, so that there are different Christs with one here and one there and one with the youth group over there and the old timers here. And the Gen-Xers. And the Millennials. And the contemporaries and the traditionals. And the megachurch and the country church. Has Christ been divided?"

No. No, Christ is the same. And we are the same in Christ. It is the same love that is given to us. The same forgiveness that is offered. The same healing that is bestowed. The same mercy that flows from the same cross. The same new life in the resurrection. The same family we are restored to as sons and daughters. It's the same good news for all of us. That we are not alone any more. We are not separated from God any more. Each of us, as broken as we are, has been redeemed. By the same Spirit, with the same hope in the Kingdom to come.

We are called to be the same. With the same Lord, and the same purpose. With the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, who gave his life so that we might have life. And have it abundantly. Bob, Mary, Tom, we

are called to be the same. We've got to follow the same Jesus. And be on the same mission. And tell the same story over and over again because it is good news. That God so loves this world. And that God so loves and overcomes hatred. That God so loves and overcomes hostility. That God so loves and overcomes everything that hurts and divides us.

We are called to be the same and to be different. And you Bob and Mary and Tom, are going to help us live out that calling. Help us be different than the world, to tell a different story about who we are and why we are here. Help us use our different gifts and skills. And help us be the same. Knowing the same love from God. The same grace of our crucified and risen Lord. The same Spirit of hope in God's kingdom that is to come.