

Calvary United Methodist Church
November 24, 2019

WITH ONE ACCORD

Rev. Barry Robison, Harrisburg District Superintendent

Children's Message:

Is it just you and me? Alright! Have you ever been called or had someone say to you: You are all thumbs? No? Sometimes I've heard people say that. They are kind of making fun of people when they say that, that they are all thumbs, that they can't do something.

Well, I want to see if that is true or not. I have a sweater here. Let's see, we've got four or five buttons on there. Alright? Can you button buttons? Are buttons easier or are zippers easier? Zippers, alright. I got zippers now. Let's do that. There we go. Here's a sweater that has zippers. Think you can zipper that for me? Alright. I want you do it though without using your thumbs. Do you think you can do that? No? Do you want to give it a try? Okay. Give it a try. See if you can zipper that without using your thumbs. Ah, ah, ah, don't use your thumb there. That's pretty tough, isn't it? You know what? It might be better to use your thumb. Let's see what happens when you use your thumb. There you go. Alright! Good job! There it is. The thumbs were important, weren't they? Absolutely!

You know what? Take a look at your thumbs. Do they look like the other fingers? No. Are they even close to the other fingers? No, they are kind of far away. Do they stick out at the same angle as your other fingers? No, they look totally different. But without them, the hand can't do what God designed the hand to do. Right? We need our thumbs. So even when someone says you are all thumbs trying to make fun of somebody, really our thumbs, without them we can't do much of what we can do in life.

And in the Bible it talks, and we are going to hear about that in just a minute, it talks about the human body, every part of the body is important. When the Bible talks about that, it is talking about everybody in the church too, even you are important to God. You have a part here in this church and we can't do without you and you can't do without everybody else out there and we can't do without each other because we are all important to God. Isn't that good news? Yes, it is.

Would you pray with me? Father God, we thank you for the ways in which you have created us in our bodies, every part is important. And we thank you for the ways you have created our churches and everyone who is a part of the church. And we thank you that our churches are important too. And so we ask that you will help us to do what you have created us to do, enable us to be your body for the world. Amen.

Thanks for coming up. I'm glad you did. Is there a treat or something that we have normally? Yes! Okay. You deserve a special one today.

Message:

John 15:1-17

One of my favorite cartoons growing up was the Rocky and Bullwinkle Show. Every time I say that I get a lot of nods and smiles. And within that show one of my favorite parts were the fractured fairy tales. If you have never seen them, they are classic fairy tales that are told with unexpected and humorous twists. So, in that case it was fun and funny to be fractured.

But there is nothing fun or funny about the fractured nature of our world today. No matter where you look around the globe it's nation against nation, people against people...anger, hatred. We can bring it closer to home in our own country. Just look at our own political landscape. You know, on second thought maybe you don't want to look there because it is so ugly right now. Folks at each other all the time. And instead of drawing closer together it seems like we are being more and more divided. I wonder if folks around the world are looking at our country and saying: Are they really the United States of America? Or are they becoming the Untied States of America?

And, of course, we can bring the issue even closer home to our own churches. We know that there is a great divide taking place in our own denomination. Anybody read the USA Today article that came out Friday? No, I didn't either, but I heard about it. In that article it as much as declares that the United Methodist Church is going to split. Is that the future that God has for us? Is that the vision of the church that the scripture presents to us? Well, you know, if it were left up just to us, that newspaper article is probably right. We are probably fractured beyond repair. But praise God that it's not all up to us. In fact very little of it is up to us.

We sang a song a little bit earlier called *The Church's One Foundation*, and what is it? Jesus Christ, our Lord. That's our foundation. Nothing human, only that which is divine. And so because the church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, we have hope for the church.

Once when Jesus was talking to his disciples he was telling them about how people can be saved. And they looked at him incredulously as he described it and said: Well, who can be saved? And he said: With people it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Not just salvation, all things are possible.

So, if we believe Jesus, and I think we can, there is hope for even our church and the fractured mess that we've made for it.

When Simon, son of Jonah, was renamed Peter by Jesus he said: I now call you Peter which means rock and on this rock I will build my church. And Jesus said: And not even the gates of Hell will prevail against it.

There are two things I want you to take out of today's message. The first one is: there is hope for the church. There is. No matter what we do to it, there is hope for the church because God is in control. Now, what the United Methodist Church going to look like in years

to come? I have no idea. God knows and I can rest comfortable in that, that no matter what happens the church will not only survive, the church will thrive, because it has done so for 2000 years over issues much worse than that which faces us today.

Now, this message is not about the human sexuality issue that is before our church. It is not about taking one side or the other. The second point that I want to address is how we are treating each other. I like to listen to two of the local radio stations, WEAC out of Lancaster and WPGM out of Carlisle. And I don't remember which station it was, but a couple of months ago I heard a Christian comedian on there and I don't know how he got to the United Methodist Church in his routine, but he did. And he said something and then he said: The United Methodist Church, and he paused, and then he said: That's an oxymoron, isn't it? Now, I guess to some folks that might be funny, but it was a slap in the face to me, because it said we are not presenting a very good witness for the world. We claim to be United Methodists and yet in our actions and the way we are treating each other, we are not showing much unity at all.

In the 15th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus said: I am the vine, you are the branches. So we have a unity and a connection with God, but he also then goes on to say that if we remain in him he will remain in us. So we are connected to each other through Jesus. As the branches we are connected to each other through the vine.

And then when we get to that wonderful passage in 1 Corinthians about the Body of Christ, it speaks of how one part can't say to the other: I don't need you. And yet that's the message that seems to be coming across now, one part saying I don't need you and another part saying I don't need you. Or both saying I don't need anybody, we'll just stay to ourselves. That's not the picture of the body that the scripture presents. In fact, did you catch the phrase as it was read? God has placed each part in the human body exactly where God wants it and since that's an example of the church that means that God has placed each one of us in the church exactly where God wants us. God has placed you here at Calvary Church because this is where God wants you right now. So you are important. And God has placed Calvary Church where God wants it...right here, right now, because this is where God wants you as a congregation. You each have an important part to play individually and congregationally.

I wonder if the Apostle Paul were to write those words today, instead of the human body he might have used the image of an orchestra. As folks are waiting for the concert to start, all they see up on the stage are a bunch of empty chairs. And then the musicians all come in and they take their places and then they all start to do their own thing. Some start playing scales. Others just seem to blow into their instruments. Others still seem to be trying to play something. Maybe they are practicing a hard part that they have to play later on. But because they are all doing their own thing at the same time, to those of us sitting out in the audience it just sounds like noise. Until the concert master gets up and gets them to focus on one note, one note that's all. And each section, each instrument, needs to play that one note until they are in tune with each other within their section. And as each section tunes to that one note, they

end up tuning to each other so that they are all in one accord. Now, if that's all they did it would be a pretty boring concert, but because they focused on one note and they tuned to each other, when the conductor gets up, then they can begin to do their own thing again. But under the guidance and directions of the conductor, instead of making noise, they are making beautiful music and harmony. But not everybody is doing the same thing. It is a different skill set to play the drums than it is to play the violin, to blow into a flute.

Just so we in the church don't all have to do the same thing. God has given us different skills and talents individually, congregationally so that together when we are focused on Christ, the one thing, and we follow then the guidance and the direction of our conductor who is also Christ, we then can play the beautiful music that God wants us to play in the world and to bring song of hope to those who need to hear it.

I have been serving as district superintendent now for four and a half years and sometimes people still ask me: what do you miss the most about being in a local church? When I am honest, the two things I miss the most are moments with the children in worship and playing in the bell choir. If you have never played in the bell choir, you might not appreciate this as much, but every ringer in the bell choir is absolutely crucial to being able to play the piece. If even one person is missing the choir really can't play the piece the way it was written. While sometimes those who are responsible for these bells will try to grab a bell that is not being played, it's just not the same. Notes get missed and rare is the bell choir who can cover the loss of just one ringer so that the audience doesn't know that something is not right.

Just so, again, each one of you is absolutely crucial for the work in ministry that God has for Calvary Church. And as a congregation you are absolutely crucial to the work in ministry that God has for us here in the Harrisburg area and beyond. And so the two things I want you to take away from today: there is hope for the church. Don't give up hope on the church. And you are important. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise. And when we work together and keep focused on Christ, we as a church will not only survive, but we will thrive and we will be able to do what God has created and designed us to do, just like a thumb.