

Edina Morningside Community Church
United Church of Christ
September 27, 2015
Rev. Howard K. Bell
Be At Peace with One Another

In today's text from the Psalms, the Psalmist concludes with this prayer that I invite you silently to pray with me. *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my rock and my redeemer."* (Psalm 19:24).

I have known this prayer for much of my life. I remember using it regularly to begin my sermons when I preached weekly during my college years. It seemed to me to be a helpful reminder when I would begin to preach, that I was praying that my words in the sermon could, in some ways, be acceptable to God. However, reading this prayer today in the context of the other verses of the Psalm 19 enriches my understanding of a deeper meaning to this prayer. The prayer conveys, for me, a powerful statement of the way in which the Psalmist is responding to hearing God's call. The Psalmist prays that every word of his life – not just today's sermon - is acceptable to God – and not only his every word, but also his every thought or meditation of his heart. The Psalmist says that the very foundation or rock of his entire life is found in God.

Today's text from Mark begins, again, with the disciples seemingly not really understanding the vision that Jesus is offering them for their community. John, one of the leaders of the disciples, is concerned that someone from outside their community is casting out demons in Jesus's name. Jesus responds – in paraphrase – so what's the problem? And then Jesus directs the disciples to not stop him. The disciples wanted to exclude and Jesus wanted to include.

Then Mark reports Jesus as having some harsh words about placing a stumbling block before "one of these little ones who believe in me" Jesus says, "It would be better if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown in into the sea." Jesus also makes some rather grotesque suggestions for what to do if various parts of our body cause us to stumble from our walk of faith. The text closes with these words: "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." The harshness of Jesus's words are balanced with his love for his followers and his recognition that his followers are to season the faith of the future generations and that Jesus' great desire is for his followers to be a community that will be at peace with one another.

Commentator Harry B. Adams summarizes this part of the text in these words: *"From all that Jesus said... it becomes clear that their saltiness involves being humble in their relationships with each other, giving of themselves for others, reaching out and accepting all the people around them. They are to "be at peace with one another."*¹

¹ Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

I invite you now to consider two questions. To what is God calling you as a member of this faith community? And to what is God calling this faith community.

“To what are you being called by God?” in relationship to your engagement here at Edina Morningside Church. I invite each of you, whether you are young or old, whether you are serving in leadership roles here at the church or serving on boards or committees or serving on the Pastoral Search Committee; or whether you are a member or a friend of this congregation; or consider yourself as “just a member” - to think of yourself as a minister – called by God. Based on the teachings of Martin Luther, all Protestant churches and denominations speak about the “priesthood of all believers”. This means that every member of a protestant church is a minister. You have heard me refer to many of the programs and activities here at Edina Morningside Church as ministries and the boards or committees that guide their work as ministry teams. For me, these are not just words. They are not just a new name to replace an old way of thinking about how the church functions or is governed. It is rather an invitation to think of yourselves truly as ministers and to think of everything that you do as part of this faith community as being engaged in ministry.

How might your engagement be different if you considered yourself to be engaged in ministry as a minister? I am not speaking of being called into the professional ministry and seeking to be authorized for ministry through ordination - although, I do not want to discourage any of you for whom that might be a consideration. But this morning, I invite you to consider how your experience might be different if you thought that God is calling you to attend the next committee or board meeting; the next choir rehearsal, the next Women’s fellowship group meeting; the next Christian Education or outreach activity or even into the small groups that are now being formed to identify specific ways this faith community can live into our mission and vision.

This leads me directly to the question: “To what is God calling this faith community now and into the future?” As I have been with you in this Interim Ministry time for five months now, I have found much to celebrate and affirm. You also found great joys during our time of review of history. I hope that each of you take the opportunity to review all of the joys that are posted on the wall in the narthex. You may also call the office if you wish to receive a copy of these electronically. It is important that we make sure we understand our past as we enter now into a comprehensive discernment of God’s call for us now and into the future.

Many of the past ministries of this church that are listed as joys are continuing today; some of them are not. Which of these ministries are we capable of continuing? Which of the ministries that have been lost might we renew again? Are there ministries that we are fulfilling today that might need to be let go? Are there exciting new ministries to which we might feel God is calling us?

We have continued to print our approved Mission and Vision Statement in our weekly church bulletins as often as space permits. They are found on today’s bulletin at the bottom

of the right inside page. I hope that you will read, reflect on and pray over these statements as we use them in the coming months as the basis for determining our future. Candidates for our settled pastor will also be most interested in seeing both these approved statements and the plans we develop to live into our mission and vision.

As I was writing this section of today's message, I began to list specific joys that I have experienced here with you. But time will not permit me to list all of them. You may review some of my past articles in the Messenger if you wish to review them. I do, however, want to lift up one of great joy that I have not previously highlighted and that I think should not be taken for granted. This joy is our time of worship. As a faith community, we are blessed each Sunday (except for Wednesdays last July) with lay greeters and ushers; inspired organ and piano playing or other instrumental music; special music and beautiful anthems by our Chancel Choir and/or Bell Choir; a faith-filled liturgy; a time with children whom Jesus directed us to welcome in his name; thoughtful sermons; sharing of joys, concerns and prayers of the community that demonstrate our compassion and care; and congregational participation in readings and in singing of hymns. I look forward to each of you completing the worship and music survey that you received this week so that we might discover ways to further enhance these ministries. I also cannot resist a quick second great joy. It is a great joy for me to know you, the members of this congregation. You are people who care and participate. You enjoy and support each other. I truly find the time of coffee and fellowship to be an amazing strength of this faith community.

There is a smaller but significant list of challenges that that I feel a need to highlight. These challenges are: 1.) An overall decline in membership and attendance; 2.) Our building needed major repair; and 3.) Balancing our budget in the future. There is so much more to be said about both the joys of this community and the challenges – and we will have more time to explore these in future sermons and in our small groups. I close with a reminder for us from today text about our saltiness. Our saltiness involves being humble in our relationships with each other, giving of ourselves for others, reaching out and accepting all the people around us, and being at peace with one another. Be at peace with one another. Be at peace. Be. May it be so. Amen.