

Arvada
United Methodist Church

February 8, 2009
Deuteronomy 23:1-3

Diversity
Isaiah 56:3

Rev. Rusty Butler
1st Co 9:16-23

Today we welcome new members into the church. In our church it is not hard to become a member. In some churches, United Methodist churches, it's more difficult to become a member. There are a certain number of classes you've got to go through, sometimes certain things you even have to believe, in some churches you've got to commit to giving a certain percentage of your income to the church. There are so many different degrees of what churches have set up to figure out how people become members or not.

There are some examples that suggest the tougher you make it to join a church the more committed people will be, the harder it is to get in, the more people will want to get in.

I'm more inclined to the National Public Radio model. If you want to support the church, call up, come on in, tune us in. If you find it important in your life...you'll commit, we trust you. If you just want to hang out and listen to a few of the programs...that's ok too. How do we figure out who gets to be in and who has to be shut out?

Four weeks ago we started this series of sermons. It was supposed to be how the church weighs in on different issues. We've done Race, Education, Health Care, and today Diversity or Inclusion or Pluralism. We didn't quite know how to title this one. I put Diversity in the Bulletin, but Inclusion was what we had down originally, because we knew this is the day when new members would be welcomed into the church.

These words, inclusion, diversity, pluralism are used interchangeably by people and to tell you the truth, I had to look them up to see what the difference is. Do you know?

Inclusion means the act of including someone or something. Inclusive means not excluding any section of society. I think of our church as inclusive. Room at the table for all. I hope that is true. I think it is. I have a feeling there are some who don't really like that.

I have trouble with inclusion. One person has written that the hardest task facing progressive Christians is accepting people who are bigoted, racist, sexist, or homophobic. If we have room at the table for all...do I have to have room for those folks too? It's tough, to be inclusive.

Diversity on the other hand, simply means being diverse or having variety. This month we had to fill in our yearly statistical report for the conference, out of the 1000 members we have in the church, the statistics said we had about 8 people of different race or ethnicity. That is a little less than 1%. I think there are a few more...but there is no way around it we are not a very diverse group. If we want to be diverse...we are going to have to work at it. People might say, "Oh but Rusty we look like Arvada" Really?" I don't think so. I went to Arvada High School this week when everyone was getting out of school. If you want to see diverse...check that out.

303 421 5135 6750 Carr Street 80004 arvadaumc.org

A church where science, religion and life are compatible

Arvada United Methodist Church

So there is inclusiveness and diversity and then the last word is pluralism. There were several definitions of that word, but the definition I'm going to work with today is the state or condition of being plural. And that simply means including more than one kind of person.

Inclusion, Diversity, Pluralism. Tough issues. Today we are taking a hard look at our church, Will you do that with me?

Would you pray with me?

Diversity – The church weighs in.

This week I had an interesting experience. I was coming home from one of the hospitals and I stopped in at a local food establishment, got my meal and sat down at a table. The place was pretty busy and so I didn't have a lot of choices of where to sit. So I sat down and began to eat. The tables were pretty close together, close enough so that you couldn't help but overhear the conversation at the next table. There were two young fellows, maybe in their late 20's...early 30's. They were deep in conversation, I noticed that they'd finished their meals...because there was nothing in front of them.

The first thing I caught was, "the wages of sin is death". Well, I thought this could be interesting. I didn't try to eavesdrop, you know that is just rude, but when someone is so close you can't hardly help but listen in, so I got a Westword and ate my lunch and kept hearing snippets of their conversation.

One fellow seemed to focus on the numerous incidences of God being angry, wrathful, vengeful. He held for a vengeful God. He was pretty excited about that kind of God. He held a kinda "I'm gonna get you God."

The other fellow seemed to be even more strict. I never heard the word love once. The conversation ranged over a lot of things, but I noticed both of the fellows were pretty intent about the fact that things would be taken care of in the last judgment and that being saved was extremely important. They seemed to have a lot invested in figuring out who was in and who was out.

I was tempted to jump into the conversation, throw my business card down then and there and have it out with them, but I thought as I listened a little more...it doesn't seem that they'd be that interested. Have you ever been someplace like that? You've got something to say, but man it just doesn't seem like it would be welcomed. Well you know how I felt then.

The problem of figuring out who should be included or excluded has always been a subject in the Bible.

Arvada United Methodist Church

Those texts that were read from Deuteronomy and Isaiah and Paul were about just that same issue. Who is in and who is out.

Deuteronomy is a series of speeches by Moses to the Hebrew people before they settle the land of Canaan. It's meant to be a foundation document... Helping to guide the people in their living, helping to found the nation of Israel.

The law found in chapter 23, no one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, Those born of an illicit union out, nor anyone 10 generations removed... none of the descendents will be a part. No ammonite or Moabite. Those laws are all about trying to figure out who is in and who is out. They stayed with the Hebrew people for years... but then the people were exiled, had to go live with foreigners for years and they came back and the person who wrote the second part of Isaiah, had a whole other idea. He said Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people: and do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree."

They were expected to be included by the time that was written... and Isaiah goes on. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord goid who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Our mission statement is hung out there on the wall. It says... but I sometimes wonder what the vote would be if we put it up for a vote.

Parker Palmer suggests that God calls us to live in community not for ourselves but for others. I wonder if that is true for us.

Yesterday, I went over to the Habitat for Humanity site. People from seven or eight different churches and a synagogue. There's this young woman and she's been through it. And it's going to be interesting a commitment to get that done. Palmer, has written, "community is a byproduct of commitment and struggle. It comes when we step forward to right some wrong, to heal some hurt, to give some service. Then we discover each other as allies." (Maybe we haven't had enough struggle.)

In true community we do not choose our companions. Instead they are given to us by grace. True community might be defined as that place where the person we least want to live with always lives.

Will we be inclusive, diverse, pluralistic?

Amen.