

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

October 17, 2021

Lesson 7

Title: The Church as a Discerning Body

Text: Matthew 16:13-19

When I ask a friend for an opinion on some subject, it can really bug me when that friend says, “It depends.” I want a “yes” or “no,” and what I get is, “It depends.” But Jesus said almost that same thing to Peter: Sometimes things need to be loosened and sometimes things need to be fastened (Matthew 16:19). I guess “it depends.”

The Bible is filled with accounts of faithful people asking questions or pondering situations to determine the will of God. Moses at the burning bush said to himself, “Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn’t burning up” (Exodus 3:3). Jeremiah challenged God about whether God had really called him to be a prophet (Jeremiah 1:6). The mother of our Lord, Mary, was naturally confused and kept asking questions about her impending pregnancy (Luke 1:29, 34). In Acts 2:5-8, pious Jews asked questions to get clarification about what was happening at Pentecost.

When God leads God’s people into a new direction, the people often struggle to make sure it is clear what God is saying and doing. How are such decisions to be made? Jesus told Peter that he was giving the disciple “the keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19). In other words, our decisions—the way the Church thinks—are to be decided by kingdom values. “What we’ve always done” and “what we’ve always taught” do not necessarily reflect the unfolding will of God. God waited to send the Messiah. Does that mean that God did not want people to accept the Savior? Of course not! Is there some new insight or clarification or deepening of thought that God is sending the 21st-century Church?

The challenge is not to find out what people want; the task is to find out what God wants. In Matthew 16:17, Jesus celebrated with Simon that God was still at work revealing the ways of God’s love. And that is still true. Jesus’ instruction remains: What needs to be loosened and what needs to be fastened (Matthew 16:19)?

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Touch your Church again, Lord.”

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