

March 11, 2012

Fragmentation of the Church – John Marshall - 2012

In times and days like these, it is easy to feel a bit out of sorts, un-centered, and unbalanced. Indeed, one could argue that it is in our un-centeredness and lack of balance that creates the real difficulties in this world. It can be said that violence, at its core, stems greatly from feelings of inequity and profound lack of love. It also can be said that our economic troubles is the direct result of our societal and structural imbalances. I doubt that if I could look into this room that I would find many that would disagree that our world seems to be emotionally, spiritually, and morally out of sorts. People talk love but it is hard to see much authentic demonstration of it. People talk strength and integrity but it seems that many, at the slightest impediment, lose sight of them. These are all symptoms of living in fragments. We tend to live fragmented lives. It all spells from a lack of being able to see wholeness or trying to bring out the importance of wholeness in our lives.

Trying to do things wholly does take effort, persistence, and concentration. It can be hard. We cannot really understand anything or anyone until we constantly seek the who's, what's, where's, when's, how's, and why's of them. That will be the only way to get to it and their depth and all of God's creation, I don't care what you say, has profound depth. We simply cannot live fulfilled lives by piecing it together. We must approach it wholly and fully. Our love must be whole love. Our compassion must be whole and authentic compassion. Likewise, we must build our spirits and souls not in a fragmented way, but a way that seeks completeness and wholeness. As Christians, we cannot follow the way of Christ in a piecemeal type of way, though many try to tear other Christians down in piecemeal ways. These people, in my view, are the Pharisees of our day, and there seems to be many many of them. They seem to relish in pulling people apart with Bible snippets, reciting chapter and verse to make their arguments without bringing out the context of the chapters, books, or whole bible itself. You see, quoting bible scripture verses can make you appear to be more righteous than the next person but no one can rightfully call themselves righteous and whenever I see people do this too frequently, I get the sense that they are being inappropriately vain in their spirituality.

For example, everyone knows the verse John 14:6, where Jesus responds to a question from Thomas in verse 5 that asks Him, after stating that they did not know where He was going, "how can we know the way?" Jesus then famously says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This is one of the most recited verses in the bible, but I think many people even take it out of context. There are a lot of Christians who click their tongues to say "Jesus, Jesus Jesus" and talk about Jesus being our savior without going into the depth of what Jesus was saying in that verse really meant. To get a drift of the deep meaning of that verse would entail reading the entire book of John and understand the context in which it was being said. I definitely recommend reading the entire book of John. In it, John attempts to bring to us his recollection of his experience of walking with Jesus. The book is rich in love and understanding and compassion towards others. In it, we are brought to the many conversations Jesus has with all children of God, even those that were considered the

heathens and Godless of the day. He approached all with love and humility. This is the way that Jesus was talking about in John 14:6. We are supposed to try to live our lives and deal with people just like He did. This is the “Way” in which He was speaking. Even our Gospel today, John 2:13, where Jesus drove out the moneychangers and the business people out of the temple should be taken in context of the entire book and looked at deeply. People who take advantage of their status in the church and hold themselves above others profit like the money changers in the temple and I would think would inspire the same type of reaction from Jesus today. When you read the entire book of John, you will get that Jesus was about love, acceptance, and utter compassion towards others. This is the “Way” that Jesus speaks about.

People often use Romans 10: 9 – 10, that says, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved” as a way, simple way at that, to be saved. Again, all you have to do is to click your tongues and say “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus” and believe He is Lord that you are saved. Again, these are verses that are often taken out of context. Read the entire letter of Paul to the Romans. I highly recommend that too. It is a beautiful book that enunciates how, for Christians, Christ changed things. Works were no longer good enough. Not only were they not good enough but were ultimately nothing. Paul was trying to get Christians to understand that people were saved by Grace and it was in Grace that people were compelled to do good works. In a way, Romans was an instruction on how Christians should be Christians. Christians should strive to be Graceful in receipt and in distribution. Yet, often, as we will see in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, it is used to parse, separate, and fragment other Christians so one can “puff” themselves up. In fact, people often discard or dismiss Romans 14 as a convenient way of excusing judgment of other people and the way they practice their spirituality.

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was Paul admonishing the Church in Corinth on how they had taken their personal beliefs in Christ and fragmenting the church. People were separating themselves into camps of “having the gift of tongues” or “having the gift of interpretation” or the “gift of prophecy” or the “gift of teaching” and looking down on those in different camps. Though God is Love and Jesus was the Way of Love, the church of Corinth had a hard time dealing with the issue of love in an authentic way. Often people recite verses in this letter to chastise others in how they are not following the Way of Jesus. If one were to read this entire letter in context, I feel they would see that Paul was not chastising individuals but chastising the church for chastising one another.

I believe that much of the Christian church today is acting like the church in Corinth, with Christians often looking down upon other children of God and even upon those of the same faith. Many are also acting like the Pharisees, acting as if they are the only ones that know God and if you do not know God in their way then you were not part of the club and you should be shunned. Isn’t this the stuff that Jesus was fighting against? He seemed to despise any sense of pompous spirituality and we should too because this was His way. Jesus had a big umbrella and a big huge tent. When you really think about it, whom did Jesus not associate Himself with? Whom did He find to be so unclean that He did not talk with or be with in love and

compassion? This is why it makes no sense to rail against Jesus but it makes perfect sense to rail against those that have taken the Christian church far away from the Way of living Jesus' life. Yes, frankly, we are human and none of us is perfect. But we as Christians are taught that we should strive to live a life as compassionate, loving, and gracious as He. This is how we can get our spirits and souls to wholeness. We cannot, through Bible verses, piece ourselves to our Christianity. We cannot fragment our way to God. God demands whole love. God demands whole effort in giving compassion towards others. Love God with all your mind, your heart, and soul. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. And there is NO ONE that is not your neighbor.

Yes, it is easy to feel fragmented in these times and days of ours. And it is responsible for our feeling the discomfort that we feel. Integrity is not made of pieces. Love cannot be put into portions. Truth cannot be cut up and divvied up in pieces. We must seek for and constantly strive for wholeness. Wholeness of mind, body and soul. The remedy is to Love completely when you Love. Give completely when you give. When you work for something, put your whole self in it. And you will never come to any wholeness when you cut people up. When you do so, you also carve up yourself. When you learn something, strive to learn about it completely, and this means that you will never cease striving to gain more knowledge or understanding about anything. We are all being made humble in these days of ours, and that is a good thing. However, being humble does not mean that you stop moving or stop striving for becoming wholly or Holy human. We are all works of art. Sculptures of our God being chiseled to our perfections. Sometimes the chisel hurts and the unneeded pieces coming off of us is a painful process. Whatever discomfort we feel in the now, we should always have Faith that God's Will will bring us to our peace. This is what being saved is about. It is not a way of doing but a way of being. Striving not to survive in pieces but being whole. When we finally start feeling the wholeness of God's love in our every moment and our everyday, I guarantee that you will feel fragmented no more. We all should be praying for more Faith. That is the salve for wholeness. That is the medicine that will cure our fragmentation.