

Seeing By a Different Light, by Daniel H. Kuhn E3050123
1 Corinthians 1:10-18 and Matthew 4:12-23
Elon Community Church, UCC, 23 February, 2005

Have you ever had a day when you have begun about five different projects and not finished one of them? Have you ever felt as though you were going in a number of different directions at the same time? We often describe such a time as “schizophrenic.” It is not really schizophrenic in clinical sense, but “schizophrenia” comes from a Greek word meaning “split” or “cleft.” The dictionary defines schizophrenia as “A condition that results from the coexistence of disparate or antagonistic activities”¹ When we are going in different directions, we feel as though we are going crazy.

The writer of the Twenty-seventh Psalm must have had the same kind of feeling. The Psalmist needed to concentrate on one purpose. We heard the plea in the Call to Worship we said this morning, “One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.”² Our mental health depends upon knowing our purpose and uniting our whole being around that purpose.

I suggest that for our own mental health, we seek “to live in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives, and behold the beauty of the Lord.” There are some sitting here who feel as though they live in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives. I have jokingly made the suggestion to a few of our dedicated members that they simply bring a bed here to sleep in at night because they spend so much time here. Sometimes it is when they are preparing for a church dinner or a major program. Sometimes it is because they are involved in a number of meetings and activities that follow each other daily.

Would it be sane to bring a bed and spend all of your time here? No! Unity of purpose does not mean living here at Elon Community Church or in any church building. The Psalmist did not mean physically living within the house of the Lord. The Hebrew word *bayit* meant “house,” but it also meant “family” or “household.” Doesn’t that make more sense: to live within the *family* or *household* of the Lord?

Our mental health can be maintained by uniting our minds and bodies and spirits around living in God’s family. I will seek after one thing: “to live in the household of the LORD all the days of my life.” I will live in God’s family every day. I will remember that all people, all of history, and all destiny are in the hands of God. I am one of God’s children. Already, I can feel mental health!

The same rule applies to the church: we need unity of purpose. The church as a whole must also be united around one purpose. We risk ecclesiastical schizophrenia when we try to go in different directions at the same time.

Look at the diversity of people gathered here this morning. We have come here for different reasons, I’m sure: peace and quiet; Biblical knowledge; the music; Christian education for their children. We have different interests. Some will say, “I belong to the morning women’s group.” Some will say, “I belong to the Adult Sunday school class.” Some will say, I belong to the choir.”

¹*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Co.

²Psalm 27:4-9, New Revised Standard Version

Some will say, "I am a Stephen Minister."

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in response to statements like that. He wrote, "... it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. Each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.'"³ They were segregating themselves into comfortable cliques and groups, forgetting why God had gathered them together into a church.

In response, Paul wrote, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose."⁴ Now, what could that same purpose be? If you're in the dark about that purpose, then I have some good news for you: "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."⁵ That light was Jesus Christ who showed God's caring, loving, and healing nature.

A great light shined on me as I was studying the texts for today: Do you realize that the first and last words the disciples heard from Jesus had to do with making disciples? The Matthew text says that when Jesus encountered Simon and Andrew, he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people"⁶ His last words, reported at the end of Matthew were, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."⁷ The first and last words the disciples heard from Jesus related to the mission he sent them on: to make disciples; to teach and to spread the good news about God's love the way Jesus demonstrated it.

Fish for people. Draw them close to you in friendship and as you do, tell them how much God loves them. Don't just stand there waiting for people to come to you, go and make disciples: make learners. "Teach them what I have commanded you:" to love and to heal.

We are followers, or learners, of Jesus Christ. Those words were not intended only for Simon, Andrew, James and John. Those words are to us today.

We are learners, followers of Christ, but I am not confident that we have done a good job of fishing for people and making disciples. How many people have you talked to about God's love for them? How many people have you brought to this church or any church?

I have news: our purpose is not to have meetings. It is not to hear the sermon or the choir. It is not to make and eat dinners. We must end our ecclesiastical schizophrenia and unite around one purpose: to fish for people; to go and make disciples.

Everything we do as a congregation should be tested by only one purpose: to bring people into the light of God's love. As approved at our Congregational Meeting on January 9, "The mission of Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ is to extend Christ's love to all people and, by our loving actions, lead people to be his disciples."

Let us go and fish for people!

³1 Corinthians 1:11

⁴1 Corinthians 1:10-18 NRSV

⁵Matthew 4:16

⁶Matthew 4:19

⁷Matthew 28:19