

Deuteronomy 5:1

Separate & Stronger

I heard something this past week. I met someone who told me that people who wear brightly colored socks are smarter. Now I wasn't sure if that meant smarter people wear brightly colored socks, or people who buy brightly colored socks get smarter so I um... **(pull up pant leg to show my brightly colored socks)**... I bought three pair. **(pause and smile BIG)**. I figured I was gonna need it for this morning's sermon.

I have been discouraged of late. I have been discouraged by the polarizing political parties. I have been discouraged by people who can only see the Bible as black and white; never realizing the love of God is filled with living colors. I was discouraged this last summer by fellow clergy who are scared because they feel like the middle is disintegrating and they are forced to choose between the political right or the political left. They feel like they are forced to choose between the theological left or the theological right. They are struggling with this idea that as Methodists we are called to hold things in tension. **(link my index fingers as if to pull apart)** My brothers and sisters, did Jesus Christ die to make the Left, right? **(pause)** Did Jesus Christ die to make the right correct? **(pause)** Jesus Christ was neither a left wing looney nor a right wing fundamentalist. Jesus set the example. **(pause)** Jesus stood apart. **(pause)** Jesus is the middle. **(pause)** And upon the rock of Christ Jesus we are to make our stand. Amen? **Amen.**

In Deuteronomy 5:1 we have the repetition of a command given by God in Exodus 19:3-6. Obey God's commandments and become God's people – a kingdom of priests – God's precious possession among all the peoples. God's commands made the Children of Israel different from all of the other peoples they would encounter. God's commandments made the Children of Israel different from all of the people they would conquer. God's people were different, set aside, and stronger for their differences.

God's commands regarding clean and unclean animals meant they would not be subject to the different kinds of diseases many of the unclean animals were carrying. A people that are not sick are stronger to fight off their enemies. God's commands regarding not eating blood, or animals with the blood still in them was another way of keeping God's chosen people healthy. God's moral laws against lying, murder, sexual immorality and in favor of justice and balance with regard to retribution cut down on the infighting in Israel. A people who are not bickering with each other are stronger to fight against their enemies. God told them God is a jealous God and the people should have no other God's before them. At this time when city state would fight against city state and people against people being united under the Lord God Almighty brought cohesion and unity we seldom see in America today. God's laws set the Children of Israel apart from their neighbors and this made them stronger.

It would have been easier to just go with the flow. As children and teenagers we experience the challenge of peer pressure. If we look back on that time we can pretty easily remember how much easier it was to go with the flow instead of standing up to our friends. I think the same is true today in our nation's politics. I won't tell you what my party affiliation is, but my parents are liberal democrats. Growing up in ultra conservative Alabama we learned to keep our mouths shut and to go with the flow. **(pause)** Is that what God wants us to do with our faith? **(pause)** Is that what God wants us to do with our walk with God? **(pause)** Shut up. Keep our faith to ourselves? It is our business and nobody else's. Don't get in anybody's face.

I tell ya, yesterday my family and I went up to North Wilkesboro for the Brushy Mountain Apple Festival. We had a great time looking at crafts, eating great food and of course enjoying some great apples. However, we couldn't help but notice there were three street preachers screaming about salvation, and condemning homosexuals. Now I'm gonna be real honest with y'all this morning. I am a preacher and I don't like having

religion shoved down my throat. I am not sure how many seeds they planted for salvation, but I know they turned most of my family off, and made quite a few people angry. Those guys were doing more to preach hate than to share the good news of salvation. That bothers me. I think that bothers me because it breeds division and divisiveness in our ranks instead of focusing on what really matters.

Sisters and brothers what is supposed to unite us has to be stronger than the tensions and peer pressure of our modern American culture. The Apostle Paul writes, "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). Sisters and brothers, God is equipping us for the work God has laid before us, and so long as we choose to remain devoted to God then there really is nothing which can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see my brothers and sisters as Christians we have been adopted into God's chosen Holy Family – the family of Israel. Like Israel we have been adopted into what was supposed to be a kingdom of priests. We got to talking about this Wednesday night in Disciple Bible Study so I'm gonna give y'all a chance to review. Church, what was the job of a priest in Israel? (pause) What was the job of the priest in Israel? (pause) The job of the priest in Israel was to offer the sacrifices up to God and to lift up the prayers of the people to God. The priest aided communication from the people to God. If all of God's chosen Holy Family is supposed to be a kingdom of priests whose prayers are God's people supposed to lift up to God? (pause) Whose sacrifices are we supposed to celebrate before the Lord? (pause) Whose, conversion stories, baptisms and acts of service are we supposed to celebrate before the Lord? (pause) I'll give you a hint. It is not ours. Our job is to live with, to serve with and celebrate with others for God's kingdom.

This morning we are celebrating World Communion Sunday with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. We come to God's table and break bread in the spirit of unity love because of the power of God's grace which has called us to serve others in God's name. What we do cannot be about our wants, our opinions and our preferences. As the Apostle Peter discovered in Acts 10:34 God shows no partiality to men. It must be God's way first. It shouldn't matter what those on the right are saying. It shouldn't matter what those on the left are protesting. What should matter above all is God's call on our lives and the work God has called us to do to minister to one another, to watch over the sick and the poor, to tend the shut ins, and to go there fore and make disciples of all nations. We are called to be fishers of people. We are called to bring in the full catch. Jesus does not give us the power to throw fish out of the boat because they don't look like us or agree with us. It's okay if they aint from around here. God calls us to be God's hands and feet reaching out as a priest to mentor, to tutor, but above all to walk with Christ together with new people and old friends that we might all be separate from the world, but stronger together.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen