

I need some volunteers this morning. Could I please have three of the youth to come down here this morning? **(Pause for the youth to come down.)** Thank you. Thank you very much. I know last night y'all went to WinterJam, and had a lot of fun and got home late so I really appreciate your help this morning. Thank you. **(Hold up the dowel rods.)** What are these? They are wooden poles. Yes they are. Would each of y'all take one of these poles and spread out a bit. Would you please take these poles and stand them up? **(pause)** Thank you. What do you think will happen if you let go of these poles? **(They will fall over.)** Let's find out. Please let go of the poles. **(Watch as they fall over.)** Please pick the poles up again and see if you can lean the poles against each other so they do not fall down. **(The youth successfully stand the poles up against each other.)** Great. Now **(picking one of the youth)** Let's add a little adversity. What happens if you push on those poles a little bit? How about you give it a try? **(Watch as the poles fall over again)** So the poles could not stand on their own? The poles only sort of stayed together if they leaned on one another? When a little adversity came their way they fell down again? Church, how well do you think the poles would stand if I tied them together? Let's find out. **(picking a youth)** Will you hold these poles for me? Thank you. **(Use the red yarn to tie these poles together to make a tri-pod. Then ask the youth to stand the poles up on the floor in front of the stairs to the altar.)** Thank you volunteers. You may return to your seats.

My sisters and brothers, Jesus told us a house divided cannot stand (Matt 12:25). This weekend there is a special called session of the General Conference. The only issues they can discuss are those related to homosexual marriage and the ordination of homosexual clergy. They have four different plans to choose from, or they can choose to leave things just the way they are. However, that is not what I want to talk about this morning. What I want to talk about is the affect the argument about this topic is having on the big "C" Church, and the local churches around us.

My sisters and brothers too many people and churches in our denomination are behaving like these poles. Either we are standing, screaming to be heard, and have our opinion valued, or we are pushing people away. I have heard too many voices argue if the Church doesn't vote this decision my way I am going to leave. I have heard of whole congregations of local churches saying, if they don't vote the way I want on the issue of homosexuality then our congregation is going to leave the United Methodist Church. **(pause)** I have to tell you it breaks my heart. Just this past week Debbie Sigmon shared with me something she posted on Facebook. It was 10 things you should never tell your pastor. One of them was, "if you don't make **X** change, or do things **my** way I am going to leave!" **(pause)** I think I have shared that I have served in some difficult and challenging appointments. I have had people use this very sentence when they weren't getting their way in a church I was serving. For the good of the congregation I have had to dig deep and find the grace to say, "If that is your decision, and you are going to stick to it then God go with you." **(pause)** It's heart breaking. It is difficult. So when I hear of people, pastors and laity together saying if the General Conference doesn't vote our way then we are going to leave I have a kind of knee jerk reaction. I can't stand a bully, and that is bullying behavior. Honestly, it makes me mad. That kind of behavior makes me angry.

So what are we to do? A called session of the General Conference is going on right now. What are we to do? **(pause)** I think we need to take a lesson from these poles, and think back to what was happening on the day of Pentecost. **(Touch one pole)** God the Father showed God's love for us. God the Father sent God the Son **(Touch another pole)** Jesus Christ to be born like one of us, to grow up like one of us, to teach us, to set the example for us to follow in serving the poor and the outcast, to truly suffer, and to be crucified and die for all of us. Jesus ascended into heaven so the Helper could come. **(Touch the third pole)** There at Pentecost when Jews from all over the ancient world came to Jerusalem for the Passover the Holy Spirit touched all of them.

**(Touch the red yard holding the poles together.)** The Apostles were given the ability to speak in each of the languages of the very different people's present. The Apostle Peter preached the good news of Jesus Christ. "[W]hen the [crowds] heard it they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him'" (Acts 2:37-39). That day some 3000 souls – Jews from all over the Ancient world were bound together by the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ.

Then in Acts chapter 10 a funny thing happens. The Holy Spirit leads the Apostle Peter to the home of a God fearing Roman Centurion – a Roman officer in charge of a 100 Roman soldiers. They were Gentiles. They were the oppressors. They were the hated enemy of the Jews. God didn't seem to care. God sent Peter – even when Peter did not understand. God sent Peter, the Holy Spirit moved and the whole of that Roman centurion's home was baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Y'all check this out. **(Bring out the big ball of red yarn. Tie the loose end of yarn from the tripod to the loose end of the big ball of yarn.)** The Holy Spirit moved and covered those Roman Gentiles. God was not just working through one chosen family – the Jews. God moved to adopt Gentiles into God's holy family as well. Church, do you know what that means? **(pause)** It means all of us are adopted into God's Holy family because of God's love, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The cord which binds these sticks together is not just for the Jews. The cord of love is for all of us. **(Start passing the big ball of yard through the choir, and then out to the congregation.)** Here. Y'all pass this around until every person in this sanctuary is touching the yarn. **(Pause just a moment as the yarn is passed around.)**

My sisters and brothers, what binds us together; what is supposed to bind us together is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we become Christians we are baptized by water and the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit which initiates us and seals us into God's holy family. It is the power of the Holy Spirit which is supposed to bind us together with cords of love which cannot be broken. We are bound together for holy purpose. We are to go out and make disciples. It's really pretty simple, disciples make disciples. We make disciples by going to those places outside of work and home where people come together on a regular basis. If you haven't figured it out there are two places for those gatherings in South Davidson. They are the restaurants here in town and anywhere a ball game is being played. Disciples go to those places. Disciples talk to the people whom they don't already know really well. Disciples figure out what their needs are, and while meeting those needs they share the good news of what God has done for them. Disciples share the good news of what being in Christian community has meant to them and how good it is to be loved by God.

My brothers and sisters when we spend our time squabbling about your opinion, or my opinion instead of doing the work of being the hands and feet of Christ the hungry starve, the fearful hide, the spirits of the oppressed are crushed, children go without education, good role models, and food; the homeless freeze or become sick and die. When we spend more time squabbling than serving we tell the world the church doesn't care about them. We tell the world Jesus Christ does not care about them. **(pause)** Every one of y'all grab that yarn. Lift it up. Christ died to save the world. Christ died so the world could be connected to God's love. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Is that the message we are united in sharing with the world; or are we too busy squabbling; telling the world, "We don't care about your problems, and neither does God?" **(pause)** Is that the kind of God we serve? **(pause)** Then what are we gonna do about it?

In the Name of Jesus Christ – Amen.