

## Planting Seeds and Moving Mountains

As some of you know, my favorite “toy” is my Mini Cooper. Previously owned, gently used, we partnered up on my 50th birthday. She came with more than I bargained for, including a GPS system. Luxury to me, necessity to Jim for his peace of mind, as getting lost is one of my greatest skills. In my pre-mini days I used driving instructions printed from several on-line sites, though a great improvement over my ability to simply use a paper map, mini’s GPS exceeds them in one simple yet critical aspect. Mini knows where I am – even when I’ve taken a wrong turn, ignored her guidance or made a detour along the way – she knows, in the moment and place in time, where I am. And she doesn’t hesitate to tell me, even when I think I’m somewhere else.

Today is a “telling where we are” day. The question which completes our “We Say Yes” ponderings “who do you say that I am” is a “telling where we are” question. Jesus asks Peter this question when rumor and supposition about the workings of God in Jesus were abundant. Jesus guided Peter past what he was hearing, like where he thought he was, to searching his heart, to where he truly was. Peter’s later denial of even knowing Jesus the man is a story of getting lost along the way. The beach talk, the “do you love me” passage called Peter from where he had wondered into the place where God would guide him for the future. The passage from Acts illustrates the importance of learning our true location, allowing God to expand our understandings, in order to move forward and further into God’s will and way.

Again, I encourage each to ponder these passages and this question in light of their personal and home, real life, journey of faith while delving into them as the community of faith, the church in these moments. We are a United Methodist Congregation. We are a connected congregation. There are answers to the question “who do you say that I am” which have been made at a denominational level – The United Methodist response, our way of proclaiming the Gospel. Though any or all members of this or any other United Methodist Church may not be in complete agreement, we, the church, speaks. The following words are not my own, they are the UMC’s, they respond to the God question of “who am I”, they tell us “where we are” and they invite us to journey as they church with God into the future:

We cannot describe God with certainty. We understand God in light of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, sometimes named as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, acknowledging that these distinctions have to do with human experiences and understandings, not with divisions within God being one. We can put into words what God *does* and how we experience God's action in our lives. God works in at least these seven ways:

*God creates.* In the beginning God created the universe, and the Creation is ongoing. From the whirling galaxies, to subatomic particles, to the unfathomable wonders of our own minds and bodies—we marvel at God's creative wisdom.

*God sustains.* God continues to be active in creation, holding all in "the everlasting arms." In particular, we affirm that God is involved in our human history—past, present, and future.

*God loves.* God loves all creation. In particular, God loves humankind, created in the divine image. This love is like that of a parent. We've followed Jesus in speaking of God as "our Father," while at times it seems that God nurtures us in a motherly way as well.

*God suffers.* Since God is present in creation, God is hurt when any aspect of creation is hurt. God especially suffers when people are injured. In all violence, abuse, injustice, prejudice, hunger, poverty, or illness, the living God is suffering in our midst.

*God judges.* All human behavior is measured by God's righteous standards—not only the behavior itself but also the motive or the intent. The Lord of life knows our sin—and judges it.

*God redeems.* Out of infinite love for each of us, God forgives our own self-destruction and renews us within. God is reconciling the individuals, groups, races, and nations that have been rent apart. God is redeeming all creation.

*God reigns.* God is the Lord of all creation and of all history. Though it may oftentimes seem that the "principalities and powers" of evil have the stronger hand, we affirm God's present and future reign.

When all is done, if we have difficulty in imagining who God is or in relating to God, there's a simple solution: *Remember Jesus*—for in the New Testament picture of Jesus, we see God.

We believe that Jesus was human. He lived as a man and died by being crucified.

We believe that Jesus is divine. He is the Son of God.

We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that the risen Christ lives today. (Christ and messiah mean the same thing—God's anointed.)

We believe that Jesus is our Savior. In Christ we receive abundant life and forgiveness of sins.

We believe that Jesus is our Lord and we are called to pattern our lives after his.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is God with us.

We believe that the Holy Spirit comforts us when we are in need and convicts us when we stray from God.

We believe that the Holy Spirit awakens us to God's will and empowers us to live obediently.

***As we believe, so we are called to live. So believing about God, we also have beliefs regarding humanity:***

We believe that God created human beings in God's image.

We believe that humans can choose to accept or reject a relationship with God.

We believe that all humans need to be in relationship with God in order to be fully human

***We hold certain beliefs regarding the church universal.***

We believe that the church is the body of Christ, an extension of Christ's life and ministry in the world today.

We believe that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

We believe that the church is "the communion of saints," a community made up of all past, present, and future disciples of Christ.

We believe that the church is called to worship God and to support those who participate in its life as they grow in faith.

***Believing so, there is a purpose and power to the church which faithfulness calls us to embrace and embody as a local congregation and a part of the larger church. Our understanding of God's authority exceeds the individual and church, we name this as God's kingdom or reign:***

We believe that the kingdom or reign of God is both a present reality and future hope.

We believe that wherever God's will is done, the kingdom or reign of God is present. It was present in Jesus' ministry, and it is also present in our world whenever persons and communities experience reconciliation, restoration, and healing.

We believe that although the fulfillment of God's kingdom--the complete restoration of creation--is still to come.

We believe that the church is called to be both witness to the vision of what God's kingdom will be like and a participant in helping to bring it to completion.

We believe that the reign of God is both personal and social. Personally, we display the kingdom of God as our hearts and minds are transformed and we become more Christ-like.

Socially, God's vision for the kingdom includes the restoration and transformation of all of creation.

These answers; to the questions where we are, what have we done/are we to do, who is our .... and who is God; call us, the church, into ever deepening levels of accountability, growth, compassion and commitment. The church cannot be about casual gathering or comfort.

Neither can the church direct or dictate God's movement or actions. One image I embrace regarding the purpose of the church is what is reflected as a sermon title in today's bulletins, planting seeds and moving mountains. We are enabled to be about both, as God directs. We can't expect mountains to move, holiness to triumph or social justice to prevail as the norm, yet we must expect, and join with God in being such truths into being. Yet we must also be committed to daily planting seeds, planting the seeds of faith, hope and love. Planting seeds which we may not see come into fruitfulness. Planting is season and out of season, not content, always reaching towards God.

So this week, let us each and all pray about the ways we can say yes to God. Let's acknowledge that we need to be questioned, to be guided, to be used.