

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up..."*

For everything there is a season, and God is in charge, but not me nor you. Let me say again, God is in charge. Let the resurrection people say, "Amen."

The Chinese word for "crisis" (危機; wēijī) contains important elements: "wei" means risk or danger, and "ji" means opportunity. Wei-ji, "crisis" in English, originally means "a risk-taking opportunity." We are always running into a crisis either in our personal life, or family or church or community. Crisis is not an end of the world, but clearly and gracefully a risk-taking opportunity to survive and thrive again.

A new era is dawning. Old folks will be gone. Becky and I will be gone. My beloved associate pastor has done a wonderful ministry here for eight years. I believe her ministry has been done so many wonderful life-changing things and thriving not only for your spiritual wellbeing but for the sake of God's kingdom. That means there are more works to do. You've got the foundation and momentum. Most of all, please trust me that great things will come out of this transition. Old stuffs will be cleared away and should be let go of. New visions, new ideas, new energies, new spirits will take places in this holy place. You are the new inclusive church! I am excited!

Let us pray: *O God, you know our struggles, our confusions, and our angst in this unknown future that is to come. So give us peace and comfort in the midst of all the emotional and physical distresses in this transitional time. And help us to deepen our faith in you so that whatever happens may we stand firm with Jesus Christ. Strengthen us to move forward as one body of Christ that is willing to go out to the world and be the church. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let the Easter people say, Amen.*

——A Video Clip, "This Is Church!"

"Don't go yet!"

We have been talking about a missional church briefly last week. The more I have thought about a missional church, the more convinced I am that UCMV is a strong missional church. Matthew 25 hub in Cedar Rapids recognizes us as the church of the year 2016. Our budget reflects that almost 35% of the total givings are given to more than 30 mission agencies across the board. Many and many volunteers spend tons of hours and energies and talents to make our ministry not just survive but thrive in those areas of outreach. You have heard my vision that our church will become the best of the best of the best church. During the

cabinet meeting last week I actually bragged about it to Bishop Trimble and other superintendents. I mean this is the church that can move the mountain. Don't you think so? This church has a lot more potentials than you can imagine. If you are not stuck in your own little box, in your own little comfort zone, or in your little circle of friends, or in your own way of belief, you will be able to see vast possibilities ahead of you.

Now today I urge all of you to be an inclusive church. Do you know Jesus is radically inclusive? He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But if I said to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. ... You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous." He is crazy! He is crazy about God and God's radical love.

Have you ever noticed that God's love is beyond your imagination? John picked that up in his Gospel: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." Those who have an only child may understand this is crazy. I have the same reaction! I can't do this unless I am really crazy. But this radical love opens the gate to heaven where everyone is welcome. This crazy love embraces everyone including enemies or those you might hate the most.

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." That is a fairly reasonable minimum penalty or punishment for the violation of the law. Otherwise, people would out of control and kill each other. Forgiveness and reconciliation are the after-the-fact matter. Once you pay for your misbehavior, then you can forgive or be forgiven anyway. It means Sins are not forgiven unless you pay the due. That is the Hebrew legal tradition that is inscribed in the book of the Law, Torah. However, if we still have to keep the law as it was in the past, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "If we do an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, we will be a blind and toothless nation."

Because of this, Jesus boldly asks, "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other... Love your enemies and pray for them!" to save everyone.

Prophet Jonah didn't want to go to the foreign country, Nineveh, capital of Assyria and deliver God's forgiving message that they might be forgiven if they repent of their sins. Jonah hated them, even though he finally went to the gentile city and spread the divine message and they actually returned to God. God already loved all the people around the world, but Jonah wasn't

ready to love those foreign strangers. He was so caught up in his own little nationalistic pride and religious arrogance so that he couldn't even accept God's radical love and forgiveness.

This is not only Jonah's own petty problem, but unfortunately it is everyone's problem. As long as you and I are stuck in our own little box, our own ego, pride and prejudice against each other, then we may not have God's love for others. "Love your enemies" is not a new commandment. It is already written there in the Bible. Jesus wants to remind us that God's love is never ending, and with that love we may love our enemies.

Let's take a look at this picture: "Door of No Return." I already shared it with you last year. The powerful image comes to my mind over and over again. When I was in Ghana, this door always stood out to me most. This is a tiny door that only one person can pass through. How narrow it is! Once you know the terrible history and story behind this little door where tens of thousands of slaves were captured, imprisoned, raped, tortured, killed, and sold to the unknown territories for almost 500 years. Who did this? The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British Empire, these colonial powers were Christian countries. The Ghanaian guide asked, "How in the world could Christian countries do these unforgivable things to human beings?" There would be no future to human beings from generation to generation, if we don't forgive each other, whether victims or victimizers. Unfortunately, the door of no return divided slaves and masters, blacks and whites, olds and youths, gays and straights, women and men, the haves and the have nots, and so on.

Look around the sanctuary. You know who you are, and you know each other. You think you get along with each other very well. Then what would you do if there is a stranger in the midst of you? Welcome or ignore or reject? What if there is a sex-offender, a prisoner, a prostitute, a homeless, a murderer, a woman with hijab (a muslim woman), an addicted person (alcoholic or narcotic), a retired soldier who killed hundreds of civilians in a combat battlefield, or a mentally challenged person, or a physically challenged person that is sitting next to you? What if there is a person of color with different accent, with different immigrant status, with different cultural behaviors, with loud voice? We are a predominantly white English speaking congregation. What does it mean to us? This summer I am moving in Central District, the Greater Des Moines area, where more than 100 different language groups live together. Last week I have heard that they are getting along with each other outside the churches, but inside the churches they are not welcomed. Unfortunately Sunday morning is the most racially segregated time in America.

Where is an inclusive Christian church? As Marcus Borg said, "Christianity is not about 'right beliefs.' It is about a change of heart. It is about the transformation of ourselves at that deep level that shapes our vision (how we see), our commitment (our loyalty, allegiance), and our values (how we live)." Becoming an inclusive church is not a question of who is in and who is out. Everyone should be included in God's realm. And everyone has to be changed to partake of one body of Christ.

Who are your enemies right now? Who is out, who is in in your little circle of life? Who are those you hate all the time? If they are your parents, or your spouses, or your children, or your friends, or annoying politicians, or your pastors, or Methodist system, or blacks or muslims or women or immigrants, why don't you sit down and pray for God's help? Why don't you ask God to give you a loving and forgiving and compassionate heart that enables you to love your enemies?

Are you wanting to be an inclusive church?

Then love your enemies. No matter who they are, love them with all your hearts without judgement, without prejudice, but with peace and compassion. If you truly love your enemies, you will find peace in your mind and in your space.

I know you cannot simply love your enemies at all. You cannot just change your mind all of sudden. You have to first get out of your ego box: strong opinions, pride, prejudice, arrogance, dogmatism, and all kinds of self-deceptive -isms. In other words, step out of how you see others as objects and how you have been seen by others, and embrace others as fellow human beings and love them first not to judge them. Open your hearts to them not to be stuck in dogmatic beliefs and institutional biases.

Be an inclusive church so that we can live in peace. Be an inclusive church so that all the children of God, no matter who they are, are respected and honored in God's authentic church. Be an inclusive church so that even Jesus will be welcomed among us. Be an inclusive church so that we can be transformed into a new being in Christ.

*Loving God, you are most compassionate, most merciful, and most forgiving. Empower us to be a radically inclusive church with radical love. Enable us to open our hearts and minds and doors so that we may embrace everyone in the world. Help us to be the change to bring peace and justice into our place as well as into the world. Amen.*