

MESSAGE "Let the name of the Lord be Praised!"

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We are following the story of Peter and John, disciples of Jesus, who healed a man who had been lame for over 40 years. Let's be clear: it was God who did the healing. Peter and John were the vessels...yet through their faith, and the lame man's faith – God's healing took place and the Jesus ministry continued going forth into the world.

There are multiple reactions to this:

The man who was healed: trusted, believed, jumped up and praised God

The people who witnessed it: their amazement opened their hearts and minds to continue learning that Jesus was real.

And there's another reaction. Let's listen:

Acts 4:1-22

4 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. **2** They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. **3** They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. **4** But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. **6** Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. **7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! **9** If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, **10** then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. **11** Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the cornerstone."^[a]

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name." ¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

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The third reaction was "being disturbed."

- They Sadducees were disturbed by:  
The ongoing teaching of resurrection (the Sadducees didn't agree)  
And who it was doing the teaching – Peter and John  
They were not trained. They were not rabbis. They were fishermen.
- The chief priests (the ones who handed Jesus over to be crucified) were disturbed that Jesus was still an issue and despite the healing, they wanted Peter and John to just be quiet.

I get the sense that the deeper driving force for them requiring Peter and John to be quiet about Jesus came from that truly human place of pride: "I don't want to be wrong"

This doesn't happen just here when we see the jolt to Judaism that God has done something new in Jesus -

It still happens; we still deal with this:

The struggle over being right about God.

"The way I know God is the right way and yours must be wrong."

The church – even while having basic agreement over Jesus – has been doing this for a very long time.

There were struggles in the early centuries to determine what this faith was about...Nicea Council decided what would be “normal” belief about Jesus and what was not.

Several hundred years later:

- The church split into eastern and western churches (eastern orthodox and roman catholic) and they split. One of the reasons with the disagreement about the source of the Holy Spirit.....yet they both continue to this day, doing God’s work and praising Jesus.

There were struggles a half a millennium later:

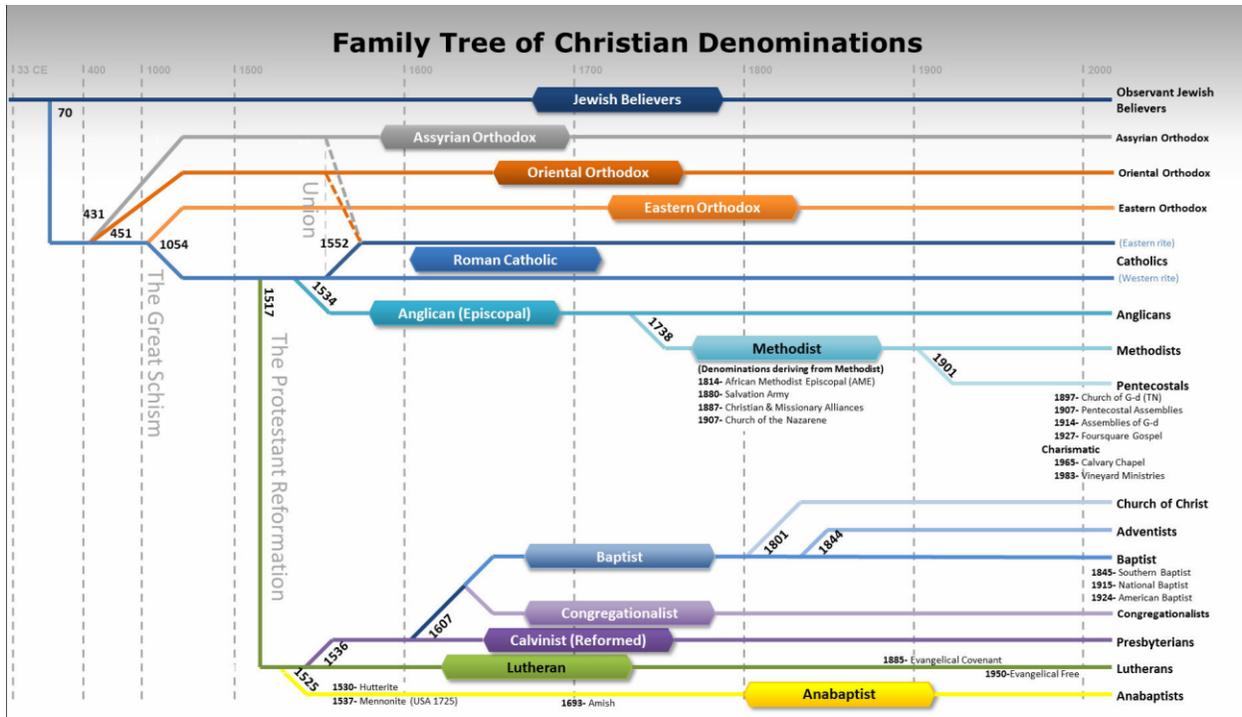
- Martin Luther – a Catholic priest – disagreed with many practices of the church – 95 things .... Luther, along with John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli formed the large protestant movement. They didn’t agree with matters with the Catholic church but neither did they agree with each other on matters of faith....and yet, the Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches, along with a host of additional traditions continue to welcome people into the body of Christ.

In our own Methodist tradition, which initially stems from a different break with the Catholic church in England, there have been a multitude of disagreements:

- Disagreement over holiness, what it looked like and how you knew – and out of the Methodist movement evolved the holiness and Pentecostal movements.
- Disagreement over the place of slaves and other people of color about their place at the communion table or their lack thereof – and the AME and AMEZ churches were formed from that disagreement which continue to this day.

In fact, out of the Methodist movement, comes the Nazarene church, the Salvation Army, and Pentecostalism to name a few, along with the Wesleyan church.

Take a look at this which gives a very simplified family tree.....



This does not even get into the non-denominational movements who disagree with being a denomination.

We United Methodists are facing our disagreement over sexuality; with both sides declaring the other to be wrong.

I honestly don't know what to make of it all. There's up sides and down sides to splits.

Katie Hiscock, our student intern this year, and I were just having this conversation this week.

- We recognized that splits over differences can weaken the witness and ability to minister as we divide monetary and human resources.
- And we recognized that splits over differences can also ensure everyone has a place in the body of Christ instead of experiencing no place.

Though I don't know how I feel about it all – what is the right and wrong way, what I do know that I believe, though, is that we *cannot* fall into the mindset of the Sadducees and chief priests – failing to recognize God's involvement in the life of those we disagree with.

We need to declare that we will not be like them – being disturbed when God still shows up in the lives of those we disagree with.

We need to not be like them, for if we do, we belittle, confine, and box-in God's universal work of salvation.

That's what the Sadducees and chief priests were doing with Peter and John.

They failed to praise God for the healing of the lame man – simply because of how it came about and through whom it took place.

Think about it: everyone was praising God because of the ex-lame man's healing....everyone except for the religious leaders because they disagreed and were disturbed.

So let us praise God this day for continuing to do Jesus' work – even in the lives of those with whom we might not see eye to eye.

Let us pray:

For your work within the Catholic and Orthodox churches, Lord we praise you  
For your work within the churches in Korea, countries in Africa, Central and South America, and anywhere the culture and practice of faith seems so different than ours, we praise you Lord.

For the way you show up in mainline, non-denominational, mega churches and independent country churches, we praise you Lord.

Whoever we are and from wherever we come, with all who follow you – we praise you Jesus, the One who is risen from the dead! Amen.