

## **The Most Segregated Hour in America**

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You've doubtless heard by now some version of "11 am on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America." Indeed, the phrase itself appears to predate Dr. King and it's not clear who said it first (Emerson and Woo, 2006). But no one said it better than Dr. King when, in 1963, he remarked, "We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning

when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation.”<sup>1</sup>

It is sadly still true that churches in the United States are more segregated than other institutions. As Emerson and Smith have so powerfully taught us, the United States remains deeply, “Divided by Faith” (2000). Today I want us to explore that together. I want to talk about the racial divide in this country – and (far more importantly) – the church’s racial divide. I want us to see just what it is that we are up against. We often talk at EP about being countercultural. And we are – because of course Jesus turns the kingdoms of this world upside down and so faithful followers of his expect to do no less. But this social construct – race – and the practices that surround it in our racialized society – surely are among the greatest challenges we face. And I want us to look at that challenge this morning. And then I want to suggest that we, we the church (I always get paranoid saying ‘we’ with Stanley Hauerwas in the room) have some practices that can help us overcome even this divide.

I want to begin with the notion that we live in a racialized society.<sup>2</sup> A racialized society is “a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships” (Emerson and Smith, 7). A racialized society “allocates differential economic, political, social and even psychological rewards to

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<sup>1</sup> The text of King’s address at Western Michigan University is online at: <http://www.wmich.edu/library/archives/mlk/q-a.html>(accessed June 2007).

<sup>2</sup> This draws on Emerson and Smith (2000), who are themselves drawing on other literature, especially Bonilla-Silva (1997).

groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed” (ibid, quoting Bonilla-Silva 1997).

In the United States, we are separate and unequal. Whites are clustered “in prestigious, better paying jobs while black Americans tend to be clustered in low-prestige, lower-paying jobs” (Emerson and Smith, 12). My university and I suspect this one, employs lots of Hispanics and African Americans – but very, very few in professoriate. Blacks and whites have vastly different unemployment rates: since 1950 there have consistently been two unemployed blacks for every unemployed white, and unemployment rates understate the disparity as they do not account for the large numbers of discouraged African Americans who have quit searching for work and thus go uncounted in the statistics (ibid). One in 11 non-Hispanic whites live in poverty; 1 in 3 African Americans do (ibid). Wealth statistics (what you own minus what you owe; more accurate than just income) bear out a “stunning disparity” even when controlling for differences in education, occupation, parent’s occupation, income, family type, and other factors” (Emerson and Smith 13). Indeed, the median net worth of African Americans is just 8% that of whites (ibid). Or look at net financial assets of college educated blacks and whites (that is net worth minus equity in home or vehicle): for whites it is 20,000 and for blacks just 750. The black middle class is very precarious – any setback – an illness, divorce, temporary unemployment will send the average middle class African American into the lower class (ibid). By any measure then, there are dramatic disparities in economic status that fall on racial lines.

When it comes to health care, studies show that whites are 89% more likely to receive coronary bypass surgery than blacks, even when controlling for age, income, and chest symptoms (Emerson and Smith, 14, citing Winslow 1992 and Henslin 1997). We could continue to talk about significant racial disparities in education and health care, infant mortality, in prison rates and sentencing, in housing and mortgage rates and so on.

And we have a set of racial practices that reproduce these racial divides, practices that have little to do with individual prejudices against members of different races. I don't believe it is thousands of racist doctors who each happen to have some deep personal animus against African Americans and thus deny life saving treatment to African Americans. There is instead something systemic at work in the U.S. healthcare system and in all of these institutions that consistently perpetuates racial divides that are so rampant. That is what we mean when we speak of institutional racism, or, to borrow the title of Bonilla-Silva's excellent book: racism without racists (2006). To use an example that Emerson and Smith (2000) use: highly educated whites are least likely to say that they are uncomfortable with black neighbors or that they would move if African Americans moved into their neighborhood. And yet, even controlling for other factors, highly educated whites are least likely to live in integrated neighborhoods or have their children in integrated schools (10). But highly educated whites have lots of choices about where they can live – and are most likely to choose “nicer” neighborhood – and nicer neighborhoods, in our racialized society, mean whiter neighborhoods (ibid).

Or, to use an example from my college experience. When I was a student, one of the women's dorms was notoriously white. Why? I don't think anyone intended it that

way, and the student affairs folks were fairly well in touch with issues and perceptions. It wasn't some bigot over in campus life making the assignments. The reason I was given was that students get to choose their dorm – and many women wanted to live where their mothers had lived. Perfectly reasonable. But I graduated from college with the child of first African American graduate of my university. Not many students of color of my generation had parents who had attended the university – or thus lived in that dorm. An institutional practice that, quite unintentionally, reinforces racial division.

Religion is another institution in the United States that, quite unintentionally, in the words of Emerson and Smith, “generally serves to reinforce these historical divides and helps create new ones” (18). Very few of our churches are interracial. There are a couple of ways to think about integrated churches. (And when a social scientist says “think about” – they mean “measure.”). We can ‘think about’ multiracial churches in binary terms: multiracial, not multiracial. To do that, you need a threshold (how many people of the minority group(s) do you need to call it interracial?) – in the literature we use a 20% threshold. So – a church is multiracial if no more than 80% of the congregation comes from one race/ethnicity (Emerson and Woo, DeYoung et al., Emerson and Smith). So – 20% of the church has to be different from the largest racial group (even if they are not of the same race). By that standard, about 7% of American congregations are multiracial (Emerson and Woo, 36). If we look at just Christian congregations, we're looking at 5.5% are racially mixed and of those about half are mixed only temporarily – they are mixed while they are in transition from one uniracial

group to another (DeYoung et al., 2). So – somewhere in the neighborhood of 2-3% of churches in the United States are stable multiracial churches.

We can also think about interracial churches on a scale – how integrated a church are you? (An 80/20 split isn't that integrated). There are a couple of ways to measure that. (What can I say, we social scientists like to measure things. I promise I won't do too much more of this at this hour of the morning). One way is a heterogeneity index – if I randomly choose two people from a congregation – how likely are they to be of a different race? If I have a 50/50 chance – then the institution is pretty integrated. And our public schools, on average, are pretty integrated: you have a 48% chance of getting two people of different races. In contrast, in most congregations in the United States you have a 2% chance of randomly selecting members of different races (Emerson and Woo, 37-38).<sup>3</sup>

If we think about churches the way think about neighborhoods with what we call a dissimilarity score, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, and Catholic congregations would all be what we call “hyper-segregated” (Emerson and Woo, 41). So if our churches were neighborhoods, our demographers be studying us – trying to figure out what's going on in these ‘hyper-segregated’ places.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> .02 is the median heterogeneity score of U.S. congregations. The mean is .06. I intentionally report the median, following Emerson and Woo, given that the few highly integrated churches skew the median upwards. Most churches have very little integration. The median heterogeneity score of public schools was not readily accessible.

<sup>4</sup> A dissimilarity score ranges from 0 (no segregation) to 1 (perfect segregation). We use this in the US to measure neighborhood segregation – and we call a neighborhood with a score of .6 as “highly segregated.” Catholic parishes average dissimilarity scores of .81, mainline protestants of .85, and evangelical protestants of .91 – all what we call “hyper-segregated.” (Emerson and Woo, 41).

Indeed, we live in a racialized society, and a society characterized by increasing segregation in many respects. But our churches do not merely reflect dominant demographic trends – our churches stand as outliers, as extremes of segregation. The average neighborhood is ten times more diverse than the average congregation and the “vast majority of congregations are substantially less racially diverse than the neighborhoods in which they reside” (Emerson and Woo, 44). Almost half of the congregations in the United States (47.3%) do not have a single member of a second racial group (Dougherty and Huyser (2008), 31). Not a single member.

And we are afflicted by the same malady that characterizes our society. Like our neighborhoods, our churches are not segregated by some nefarious law – but by the great American virtue: choice. (Or as my Baptist friends prefer: freedom. Who’s against freedom?). And in our culture (yes, including our church culture) of consumerism and consumer choice, churches market and fill niches. And shoppers (that would us congregants) look for places that “fit our needs.” And those places generally include folks who, surprise, surprise, look like us.

I realize the metaphor I’m using of a religious marketplace and churches as firms is problematic – and I don’t like it either, but I think there are some insights to be had here – so bear with me. Those with the “most choice” – white protestants (there are more white protestants, and more protestant congregations – are most likely to be in segregated churches. Indeed, just 5% of white Protestants worship in multiracial churches (Emerson and Woo, 86). In contrast, there are far fewer Black and Asian Catholics – and fewer Catholic parishes. Those folks are the most likely to attend multiracial congregations

(ibid). There's nothing especially surprising here – when given the choice, we (consciously or not) elect to be with those that are like us. And the dominant way we identify those “like us” is in racial terms.

Blacks and whites, and black and white Christians, see issues of race in fundamentally different ways. I noted earlier the racial inequality that is pervasive in the United States. One of the puzzles in the literature has long been how Americans, who uniformly see racial inequality as a bad thing, consistently oppose government policies aimed at remedying it. The answer appears to lie in understandings of the cause of that inequality. That is, white Americans appear to believe that inequality results from individual blacks making bad choices, leading to unequal outcomes. And so no (structural) solution is needed to what is instead an individual problem (Hinojosa and Park 2004). If African Americans just get their act together the problem will be solved, so the thinking goes.

The General Social Survey asks the question this way: “On Average, African Americans/Blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are....A) Mainly due to discrimination, C) Because African Americans/Blacks don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty? Or D) Because most African-Americans/Blacks just don't have the willpower or motivation to pull themselves out of poverty? One of these taps into an individual cause of inequality and blames the victim: lack of will.<sup>5</sup> We also have two structural

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<sup>5</sup> Respondents answer “yes or no” to each question. There is a fourth option given in the GSS. B) Because African Americans/Blacks have less in-born ability to learn. In-born disability is a remnant of biological racism that is no longer acceptable in American public life and affirmative answers have consistently declined over time and as a result this question is most often dropped in the literature. See Hinojosa and Park (2004) for further discussion.



explanations: discrimination and lack of access to education. Responses to these questions vary significantly by race, and by religious tradition. Most blacks (64%) affirm discrimination (compared to 34% of whites) while most whites affirm lack of motivation (52%) (Hinojosa and Park 2004). Evangelical Protestants are most likely to affirm the individual cause (lack of motivation) and least likely affirm the structural (discrimination and access to education). Black Protestants, in contrast, are least likely to affirm lack of motivation and most likely to affirm discrimination (ibid).<sup>6</sup>

These findings, especially on the individual orientation of Evangelicals, are not surprising. The groundbreaking work of Emerson and Smith (2000) has shown that Evangelicals have a thoroughgoing individualism that almost forces an individual account of racial inequality. Evangelicals are accountable freewill individualists – that is they believe that humans have a free will, and can act independently and free of outside influences, and are accountable to God for their (individual) actions. So many evangelicals reject the premise – that there is racial inequality – and are offended by it. Emerson and Smith note that the very question “challenges their faith in God and in America” (103). (A lot of us long ago lost faith in one of those!). But if humans have free will, and there is equal opportunity, then really the only thing that can account for racial inequality is the failings of individual blacks. And Emerson and Smith supplement the survey questions we have with extensive interviews with white evangelicals and indeed they consistently make just this move - The “overarching theme” of most whites

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<sup>6</sup> Among Christian traditions. Jewish respondents are the least likely to affirm lack of motivation and the “other” religious category was also less likely to affirm lack of motivation than black protestants.

was that “black Americans lack hope and ambition,” they “can’t see what is truly possible” (Emerson and Smith 100).

Given the individual orientation and focus, it’s no surprise that the solutions evangelicals offer are also individual. They focus on healing personal relationships and reconciling blacks and whites one relationship at a time. This too makes sense given their theological orientation. They also place a primary value on individual relationships – especially the personal relationship with God, but also by extension other personal relationships (family and so forth). Again, the only racial problem has to be individual prejudice and the only way to fix it is in relationship.<sup>7</sup> Even during the Jim Crow era, evangelicals thought it was their duty to treat individual blacks with respect – but not challenge the institutions. The individual focus in evangelical theology prevents such a move (ibid, 75). Now – I’m all for individual reconciliation. That’s absolutely critical. But to make progress in overcoming the racial inequality that persists, we have to make efforts to address structural and institutional factors as well.

What surprised Jerry Park and I when we did our study was that the Christian traditions we expected to be more structural in their thinking about racial inequality, were not in fact so (Hinojosa and Park, 235). When religion is statistically significant – it is always either to deny a structural cause of racial inequality or to affirm an individual cause (ibid). This thoroughgoing individualism that afflicts white evangelicals also

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<sup>7</sup> White evangelicals tend to view racial problems as a result of one or more of: 1) prejudiced individuals, 2) other groups – usually African Americans – “trying to make problems a group issues when there is nothing more than individual problems” and 3) “a fabrication of the self-interested – again often African Americans, but also the media, the government, or liberals” (Emerson and Smith 74).

affects Catholics and Mainline Protestants, if not quite to the same degree.<sup>8</sup> And when we look within white religious traditions, African Americans have opinion profiles that look more like other African Americans than their white coreligionists. This is likely because of racial segregation within white denominations, as Lincoln and Mamiya argue that “the overwhelming majority” of blacks in white denominations are “in predominantly black churches” in those white denominations (xii). So: well beyond American evangelicalism, religion in the United States does not alter racial subgroups and appears to enforce racial divides (Hinojosa and Park 2004).

So – add all of this up and the picture looks pretty bleak. We have a lot working against us. Most of us, especially most whites, don’t have significant interracial relationships (I’ll come back to contact theory in a minute – and you thought the data part was dry...). We have demographics and a racialized culture working against us. And we a lot of history working against us – churches in the U.S. have been segregated since most blacks left integrated (but racist) churches during the Civil War and Reconstruction. So is it any wonder that so few churches are interracial and that interracial churches struggle? Being a multiracial church is really hard.... (And all the pastors in the room said – it’s just like an academic to tell us what we already knew). And most of you already knew that. As the pastors in the room know far better than the rest of us, keeping a church together is, under the best of circumstances, exceedingly difficult. (As one of my closest friends likes to say, “Church work is no place for Christians.”)

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<sup>8</sup> Black Protestants were similarly not more structural in their thinking. For a discussion of why this might be the case, see Hinojosa and Park (2004), Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), and Edgell and Tranby, 2007.

Multiracial churches face different kinds of difficulties however. As one African American pastor said, reflecting on the difficulty of leading his diverse congregation, “This interracial church thing is wearing me out” (Emerson and Woo, 131). Most of those I think you expect – and we could play “name that struggle” and get most of them pretty quickly: worship (or, “it’s all fine and dandy until you start messing with the music”), preaching style, service length, starting time, ending time, disciplining of children, what kind of food to serve at fellowship time, leadership questions, the kinds of programs to have, theological emphases, and on down the line.....

All of these issues are difficult in any church, but they are even more difficult in a multiracial church because we have culturally-constructed notions of what is right and wrong on all of these matters. And when I say culturally constructed – I am not in the least diminishing the power or importance of those constructs. These cultural constructs affect us deeply and profoundly, in ways we cannot accurately describe and most often do not fully understand ourselves. How does being white shape the way you view the world? I suppose I should pick on myself: how does being Hispanic, raised in a mixed-race house affect the way I view the world? I have some ideas – because unlike most whites I do have to face this one pretty often. But I don’t have the whole picture yet and I can’t begin to articulate it all. But those cultural constructs are powerful.

In fact, these constructs have enormous power over us because they condition us to accept some things and reject others; to see some things as good or even holy and other things as, well, bad and unholy. Here’s an example that hits home this morning. I have a culturally constructed sense of what an appropriate form of argument is. This talk – is a

white talk. It is rational and emotion-free. It's intellectual (with a few bad jokes mixed in). I am not engaging your emotions or engaging in any sort of dialogue with you. If I did engage your emotions – some of you would get suspicious – you're playing to our emotions (probably because you don't have a 'good argument')...so instead you're manipulating us....In contrast, in the black church, this same talk would miss the mark... because the Black Church refuses to separate the mind from the passion (Emerson and Woo, 138)...because our emotions are part of us....And I haven't engaged all of who you are – and so I have by definition missed something really important. And you'd be suspicious of me because of what I haven't done. At best, I've given you half the story. And in a different context you'd see that – and you'd wonder why. (Or, as I was told by a parishioner in Cuba once, loosely translated, that was a nice and all, but you really need to preach. I admit it wasn't the best sermon – but it's not clear that, to this fellow at least, it really was a sermon. I was in the pulpit, and I'd spoken, but I hadn't preached.)

Or take my favorite example...Time...In graduate school, most of my friends were doing what I was doing – studying Latin American politics. Most them were also from Latin America and Spanish was the primary language among the students and professors. We always laughed about our hangups about time. And whenever we got together, we made sure that we set a time, and that we knew whose time we were operating on: we called it “hora fija” – or “fixed time” – as opposed to, well, Latin American time..And we laughed about it..And adjusted to it ...My colleagues learned quickly that classes started on “hora fija.”....When we got together for dinner, if we were

eating at 8pm “tiempo Latino” – which really means 10 or so, well, I better get a bite to eat first.

But in church, this is no laughing matter because the stakes are so much higher. What time does worship start? Does it start at 11:00 am – because God is a God of order, and we should honor that? (And where I grew up – because the Cowboys kick off at noon). Or does church start whenever the Spirit leads – because you must not stifle the work of the Holy Spirit? As one frustrated Sunday School teacher reported to some researchers, “one culture thinks it offensive not be on time, the other thinks it offensive to be on time. No easy solution there” he quipped (Chisteron, Edwards and Emerson, 53). We have two culturally constructed notions of time. And in church, we overlay a spiritual principle. And pretty soon the same silly issue my grad school buddies and I laughed about (and adjusted to) leads to two groups of people, united in their Baptism and in the cause of creating a church that breaks down racial boundaries, thinking the other is being less faithful in following Christ. These minor issues really aren’t so minor, are they?

Our racialized cultural constructs are powerful and they can lead to deep conflict. Indeed, while survey research suggests that multiracial churches don’t actually have more conflicts than uniraical congregations, they do tend to have more intense conflicts (Emerson and Woo, 146). Life in a multiracial church is especially hard on whites who “have less tolerance for not being in the core group, the position they are accustomed to in the larger society” (Chisteron, Edwards and Emerson, 55). And indeed the literature is pretty clear that whites struggle with multiracial churches – often leaving such

churches as they become mixed – not unlike how whites tend to flee neighborhoods that undergo the same transition. It is impossible, write Chisteron, Edwards and Emerson, to integrate a church without losing at least some white members, even some who are on board with the project (101). While minorities are more used to, and have a “greater patience” for “cultural practices and social structures that do not favor them” (Chisteron, Edwards and Emerson 55), that also explains the attraction of uniraical minority churches: it is the one place where non-whites are free of the structures that work against them and where they can be at home in their own culture.

This is a lot to overcome. And yet overcome we must. And we can. And I’m sure we’ll talk more today and tomorrow about ways we can overcome these barriers. But I want to suggest a few things here. One is that we need to remember that the church, even in America, was not always segregated. The first African American – the first child born to slave parents – was Baptized into a white Anglican Church in 1660 (DeYoung et al) and there have been moments when blacks and whites worshipped together even in the U.S. (at the beginning, during and after the Great Awakening, and during the Civil War and Reconstruction). And the church has always dealt with cultural clashes. Indeed, the Gospel of Acts records two powerful cultural/ethnic clashes in the early church: complaints about preferential treatment given to Palestinian widows over Greek-speaking immigrant widows in the daily distribution of food and the question of whether Gentiles needed to first become Jews in order to be part of the Body. Both of these could have torn the church apart. But by God’s grace, they did not. Instead the

Body stayed together and worked it out. Painfully and with plenty of mistakes along the way I am sure.

And so must we. Indeed, I would suggest that if we are going to cross even this divide, we are only going to do so in the church. This is where contact theory comes back (only a social scientist would make this move). But here's the idea. What changes attitudes about race is significant contact with members of another race. High Contact evangelicals are significantly less individual and more structural in their account of racial inequality than other Evangelicals. A significant positive impact – and the impact comes from the contact (Emerson and Smith 107). It takes a dense network of relationships that cross racial lines. It's both numbers of friends, and the intensity of the relationship – being married interracially, for instance, significantly increases the likelihood of being in an multiracial church (Emerson and Woo, 91). Or to have someone not of your race you would consider one of your three or four closest friends. Significant interracial contact is what matters most in terms of affecting attitudes about race. Emerson and Smith tell us that a little contact may be worse than none – if you have a little cross-racial contact, you see the significance of racial struggles, but apply the cultural tools of American Christian individualism to the solution (Emerson and Smith 2000). You change tools – change the way you think about racial issues– only with significant interracial contact.

Indeed, the literature suggests that having a black friend or two “seems to serve for whites as a ‘license to believe whatever they wish to’ about blacks, and because they have a friend, to be quite certain in their beliefs” (Emerson and Smith, quoting from Jackman and Crane, 108). And I thought I was making it up. I mean, how many times



have I heard the most insensitive, bigoted, or flat out stupid sentence follow the words, “I have a friend who is....” I’m sure every person of color in the room has a story or two....My favorite, Lynne forgive me for telling this, but soon after we’d been married one of my wife’s relatives says to me, “Victor, you don’t have a Latino personality.” And this is based on the one other Latino that he knows (one!).... Maybe I’d thrown the silverware at him, screamed, and stormed out of the restaurant that would have been proof that I really am Latino? I don’t know....A little contact is worse than none at all.

If we’re going to do this, we have to do it. We have to go all the way. It is having significant interracial contact that can change us. Most folks, especially most white folks, do not have significant contact outside their own race. One major study suggests that fewer than 10% of whites have black friends (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 110). When was the last time you were the only white person sitting at the lunch table with a group of friends? How’d you feel? It’s hard. It’s uncomfortable. Even painful...For all of the reasons we’ve discussed. We have a lot of cultural baggage we’re not even aware of it all. (I wish I could tell you that you’ll get used to it if you do it every day. You don’t....Trust me....).

And yet where better than the church. Where better than the church to build meaningful, significant relationships with people who are different than we are – who we otherwise would have nothing to do with. To become aware of one another and of ourselves. We are way past contact theory now folks. I’m talking about living life with people I otherwise wouldn’t – but Jesus invited them into His kingdom just as he invited me. And together, we can work toward something different, something better. Indeed, I

suggest that it is in the church where we have something even bigger than all the garbage of history and culture. We have our Baptism. We have been born anew into a different kingdom, with a whole different history – a whole different story. And our reality need not resemble the American reality -- Thanks be to God.

It's hard. And it will be hard. And we'll be tempted to spiritualize some cultural differences and we'll get in lots of trouble and we'll make lots of mistakes. But maybe, just maybe, we'll be faithful...and we'll make some progress too. But the goal cannot be to have a multiracial church for the sake of having a multiracial church (oh wouldn't this be cool..radical..countercultural...). The literature is pretty clear here – churches that do that fail. Churches that succeed do so because they have a sense of mission that requires them to be multiracial. And I think we know that intuitively. Our goal at EP is not be countercultural for the sake of being countercultural or to be radical disciples for the sake of being radical. Our goal is, and must remain, to be faithful. I happen to think that being faithful means, in part, working to cross even this divide....

And I think we have a practice that can help. (There are others of course – but here's one). As our own Beth Newman (2007) has taught us so well, Christian hospitality names a practice that shows us the way. Hospitality is a communal practice that is learned over time. As Beth argues, “Hospitality names our graced participation in the triune life of God, an extraordinary adventure where together we discover how to live out of an abundance heretofore unimagined” (14); it is “a gift of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the church and the world” (23).

The practice of Christian hospitality calls us to welcome different people with different gifts for a very specific purpose: the building of the church. As Beth reminds us, When Paul lists the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he tell us that these gifts are given for the “common good” (NIV verse 7). We don’t celebrate gifts in and of themselves, for their own sake. It’s not about celebrating arms and legs and hands. We celebrate them because the Body’s not complete without them – ALL of them. The church is not complete unless **all** the gifts of the Spirit are present [this draws on Newman, 28-31].

We’re not here this week to celebrate diversity for the sake of diversity. And we’re not interested in learning to tolerate others. I hope we’re committed to crossing his racial divide because we know the church isn’t complete until the gifts of all of Christ’s people are used there. We don’t value the difference. We value the gifts these ‘others’ bring to build up the church. We know that we are not complete without them – ALL of them.

And I’m nervous using hospitality here – because the biggest mistake we could possibly make is a mistake I hear being made all of the time in churches who want more people of color – “they are welcome here. And if we just let them know they are welcome, they’ll come,” (and maybe we won’t have to change anything). That’s a disaster. (And not a little condescending). It won’t work. And it’s not Christian hospitality.

Again, as Beth has taught us, Christian hospitality requires us to give to and receive from the other. She reminds us that “the role of guest and host are fluid when hospitality is practiced rightly” (Newman 121). She tells us that we must come to see

ourselves “as both guests, receiving from the other, and hosts, offering ourselves to the other” (Newman 144). That really could be transforming....

I close today with one more anecdote – and then we can talk. Earlier this year, my friend and writing partner Jerry Park and I had the opportunity to work with a multiracial church in Waco. Their pastoral team called us and Jerry and I spent a lot of time with them over the course of several weeks and then went to the church and did some teaching and some work. The church is doing some remarkable things and crossing class and racial and language barriers in significant ways – but they are having the kinds of struggles that you’d expect a church like that to have. As stories were being told, Jerry and I could almost predict reactions and conflicts. When we went to work with the whole church, I related to the group what I had told the pastoral team at the very beginning of our conversation: Do you want the good news or the bad news? And they laughed. And I laughed. And I said – it doesn’t matter – it’s the same news. You are having these struggles because you are trying to be faithful. And being faithful in this way is hard – so hard that 95 percent of churches in the United States don’t even try to cross the divides you are trying to cross. It’s just too hard. So take heart... You are doing remarkable work – and these struggles are a sign of that.

May it be said of us....May we be willing to struggle...As Beth reminds us, this is about “our participation in the life of God, a participation that might be as terrifying as it is consoling” (13). May we be willing to struggle...to be terrified....to be faithful... Amen and Amen...

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