

Bruton Parish Episcopal Church
The Second Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev'd Christopher L. Epperson
Sunday, June 6, 2021

The most difficult element of interpersonal communication is that we don't take the time to listen. We think that we do, but when hearing our friends or enemies for that matter, we shift to formulating our response. We rarely engage in dialogue, talking through something, to duologue, two people talking. True dialogue is a conversation seeking understanding, but duologue is talking at each other.

The notion of bipartisanship in our system of government is a great example of this dynamic. Both parties give lip service to working together, but that is not really the goal. Both political parties do not come to the table prepared to work together in good faith. They simply posture, unwilling to see the merits of the perspective of the other side. The presumption is that the other side's perspective has no merit, and must be rejected out of hand. There can't be bipartisanship because it is theatre rather than substance. With rare exception, it is about the demonization of the other.

In the scriptures, Jesus seeks to have a dialogue. He seeks to make a real case for himself and his perspective. Jesus tells stories that invite the hearer into a position to think, weigh the merits of his point, and he seeks to hear his opposition. The great irony is that Jesus is making God's case, and God's case is rejected because Jesus' opponents refuse to hear and understand.

In the debate, we see in the present Gospel text, Jesus points out the inconsistencies of the attack he faces. He says that the devil does not oppose himself. He says that You can't find stability on shifting sand. Those committed to God cannot be overcome, unless they are somehow subdued. Faithful communities cannot exist, unless the faithful are willing to see the expansiveness of Christian community. The Holy Spirit is the source of all of it, rejection of the Spirit causes it all to fall apart. If it all falls apart, we are lost.

Paul writes the church in Corinth, making a complimentary appeal. Paul points to the expansiveness of God's grace. Paul reminds a particular church at a particular time in a particular place to let go of time bound, limited perspectives, and to focus on the enduring goal of God's dream for creation and creatures. God seeks to bind all into one through the redemptive work of Christ, the eternal Word of God, and that work overrides our peculiar penchants.

I am certainly no St. Paul, but I want to remind us to hear and listen. We are graced with new ears in Christ, calling us to view the world, where God is working his purpose out. The Spirit blows where it will, and we are called out of the temporal to watch carefully and thoughtfully. Jesus said that we are in the world, but not to be of the world.

Expansiveness and true dialogue are in short supply. Shouldn't we find them in the Church in the Body of Christ? Do we want to be of the Spirit, or of the flesh? God help us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church.