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May 6, 2018  
1 Corinthians 12:4-31

In today's opening words you heard me say, "We welcome you if you are traditional or radical, or somewhere in between or none of the above. Never have I used the word "traditional" to describe anyone in this congregation. You are and have been on the liberal leaning side of nearly every political issue I know of—you believe LGBTQ+ folks should be loved and accepted and welcomed into all roles of church life. You believe that Black Lives Matter. You believe that the poor should be cared for—and maybe even the idea that there should be no poor. You reject some of the more traditional (Baptist) understandings of theology. I've not met a single person here who believes that women should be quiet in church. Nary a person holds that slaves are Biblical, and therefore, okay. I've not even heard anyone say that substitutionary atonement is tantamount to the gospel.

And yet. There are those of you who are "traditional."

Traditional, yes. Maybe not conservative, though.

Traditionalists are people whose beliefs are centered on tradition and keeping things the way they are.

What are the marks of tradition in our congregation? Well, this chapel. All 2,250 seats of it. It's been YEARS since it was full. Formal worship is a mark of tradition here. A relationship with the University has become a tradition, at one time it was a reciprocal relationship with the University. At one time, we *were* much of the University, so it was us doing the work, but now, we rely deeply on *them*. We also have a strong commitment to social justice—that's a tradition here. And we have a streak of rebellion around here—that's tradition. And finally, we have a dedication to using our brains. **Those final three may all be related.**

You might be wondering why it matters that there are traditionalists among us today.

It matters because the Church (that's capital-C CHURCH) is in trouble. You heard Ken Meyers talk about it—we're in a hinge moment, a reformation moment, and the generations who are coming need the space and time to create something different than the Church (that's still capital-C CHURCH) that we have been attending.

It matters because we, too, are in a season of decline. Just this year, we've lost five people we love. And although none of them were attending church much, they still were in our heart as *ours*. They belonged with us.

It matters today because traditionalists don't like to change. It matters today because sometimes traditionalists are so resistant to change that they resist any move that is

beneficial to the Church (yes, that's capital C CHURCH)—even beneficial to themselves—in favor of tradition.

But lest you think that I am against traditionalists, I want to tell you... traditionalists are the ones that help the congregation *stay itself*, and stay on mission, even in tough times. Traditionalists are committed—so much that they are often generous to the church, keeping it afloat during difficult times.

Church needs all of us. **Traditionalists, radicals, and somewhere in between and none of the above.**

1 Corinthians tells us that in the church, the Body of Christ, there is diversity.

It says:

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; God's various ministries are carried out everywhere, and God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere.

And God they all originate in God's Spirit.

Each and every person is given something to do that shows who God is:

The variety of those things to do is wonderful:

There's wise counsel,

clear understanding,

simple trust,

healing the sick,

miraculous acts,

proclamation.

discernment,

tongues, and

interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God.

Every person in the congregation, whether traditionalist or radical, or somewhere in between or none of the above, has a gift to give, and when those gifts are used, it creates a wonderful unity and an amazing diversity.

Unity is not uniformity. And diversity is not division.

See if you can follow me. Traditionalists want everything to stay the same. Radicals want to change everything. But we gather together, unified in the love of the church.

The traditionalists give us roots. And the radicals give us wings.

Let me put it another way.

Many traditionalists love worshiping in Wait Chapel. It is a space where so much of your church life happened. Where people you love were baptized, married, and buried, where you felt the love of God and the Spirit move.

But many of you traditionalists also now have a difficult time coming into this space. It's hard to manage the steep incline to get to the Narthex for the reception. hard to navigate the steps and the parking, and all the things.

How can we keep the feeling of this space, and make it easier for everyone to be included? Hold on to ourselves, and hold on to ourselves. Those are both really important to the traditionalists.

For you traditionalists, we need your voice. We need your guidance. And we need your presence. And I don't believe you are a voice of yesterday... your voice is as important as it ever was.

I hope you will hear me say this as loud and as clearly as I can...

This church is certainly in flux,  
like much of the church throughout the United States and the western world.

You have a choice,

you can demand that the church remain the same,  
you can resist the changes and seek to subvert them at every turn,  
or you can drop out because it doesn't suit you.

**Or** you can help us make those changes that we need to make to survive.

You can champion change  
while at the same time requiring us to stay true to who we are—  
with your wise counsel, clear understanding, and simple trust.

You can use your voice to proclaim the truth of what is important in our congregation—  
those traditions that are of the Spirit—

to champion social justice,  
to engage our brains in the service of God,  
to foster a mutually beneficial relationship with the University.

Hold our feet to the fire, and join us in the work.

You know, this is the season of Easter. If we learn nothing else from Easter, we know that resurrection happens. That what looks like death is really another thing totally. That new life always comes after the hardest things.

I've been thinking about what the future of the church (that's capital C CHURCH) looks like, and I hear it best in these words by adrienne maree brown

The future of the church looks like

“collaboration,

compassion,

curiosity,

non-possessive love,

play,

mediation,

and the patience that comes from seeing ourselves in a much longer arc of time than we are encouraged to see in the instantaneous culture of the modern world.”

The future of the church looks like our little Skye.

The future of the church looks like our interns Erica and Alexx.

And the future of the church looks like Dick and Betty Mae.

We all get there together, or we don't get there at all.

Amen.