

I have talked about this before, but I am not sure who I have spoken to and who I haven't, so some of you are going to have to hear this story again. A couple of months ago, I was asked to join the North Polk pastor's group, and I thought it was strange that they wanted me to join this cuz as far as I can remember we don't have anybody that goes to North Polk anymore. And I'm not sure who we have that's active that lives in Polk County. So I thought it was really strange that they reached out to me to join this group and each time that they had the meeting I couldn't go. So I've been trying to go to this thing for a year and I finally was able to. And it's a really interesting group because all of the pastors there have been pastors for a very long time, either where they are at or just in general.

And it's the pastor at Palestine, the Lutheran church outside of Huxley. We have the pastor for the Methodist Church in Slater and Sheldahl. There is the pastor for the Alleman UCC Church, and we've got two pastors from Elkhart, and then me. So it's like really interesting especially since there is nobody from Polk City in this group either. But I guess that is a different story.

But as we are talking the first time we get together, I finally ask why am I here. Why do you guys want me to be a part of it because I am not a part of the North Polk school district, and some of the churches there are not either. I am not a part of Polk County really but some of them aren't either. So this is really interesting, so I am like why am I here? And the pastor from Salem, the Alleman UCC church is like well because we hear a lot of things about you and things that you are doing. Ok like what. We heard about the backpack program and somehow you created this small miracle of getting a church in Madrid that has nothing to do with the rest of you to come to Lenten lunches. I am like okay, I don't know if that is all me, but I will take credit for it. No I won't but I am like we are talking. Then we continue and that day wraps up, and then we come to the next one which was last week.

And we are talking more and more and finally one of them asks me, they simply say, how do you do it? And I am like how do I do what? How do you preach in a town you grew up in. I don't know that I would say that what I do is preaching, but it is hard. It is really hard because I know all of these people, and they know me. So it isn't like I can make stuff up. And they are like what about you working with other towns, other communities, other places like this. Well right now we are still working on Madrid, unless you count Hopkins Grove, and we do a little bit with them but not as much as we would all like.

I am like where are you going with this. Well, we want to do an outreach program. Ok. We want you to start it. Ok, what is the outreach program? We don't know. You guys are making this really hard on me. So, you guys have an outreach program that you don't know what you want to do, you don't know who you want to be included in it, you don't know what you want to accomplish, you don't know how we are going to do it. Do you at least know why we are going to do it? They are like YES! Ok what is it. They said all of our towns hate each other. AWESOME! So you want me to bring all of these together? You want me to bring all of these little communities together. Why me?

They are like well you are from here and none of us are. I am like I am from Madrid. I know people in all of these other parts, and I am sure I am related to people in a number of these little towns but I don't know if I can do this by myself. That day we are talking and it made me think of today's readings. Most of us grew up here. We know that all of these little towns have little bits and pieces that they like about each other, that they don't like about each other.

They are in the same school districts. The minister at Palestine made a point. You know all the people that go to Ballard, the Huxley people are very different from the Slater people and they hate each other. Yes they do, and what is your point? I don't get it, I don't understand. And then the Slater and Sheldahl ministers are like we are Methodist and both of these churches but they don't like each other and they refuse to do things together. And so we were talking about that and we were talking about today's reading. Because in the reading, people are very boastful of who they are. They are very independent of where they came from. And they like to talk about it even though they all have the same goal, they are very separate and segregated by who they are, by where they came from and how they developed.

Last week we started talking about Paul starting the church in Thessalonica and making his rounds around the sea there going to all these towns in Mesopotamia and Greece. And every place he goes is a little different. Remember last week he got ran out of Thessalonica in three weeks. But now he is in Corinth. And he is in Corinth for about two years. And Corinth is a very different town than the rest in that area. Because Corinth was completely destroyed at one point in history. And the Romans came back and reestablished it. So the first people to live there were Romans and at this time, they made it a safe haven for the slaves that they had freed from the different places they had conquered/ They let them settle there, so they had a very large Jewish population and a very large Roman population at first. And Corinth is in Greece, so eventually people from the other Greece communities migrated there so they have three very different populations. And it is on the sea. So it is a port. So they have other people coming in from other places all the time.. It is just this large hodge podge of different people. And they are all staying true to their heritage. They are all staying true to where they came from.

Even though they have all joined Paul's church, they are still talking about, well we were baptized by this person. We were one of the original founders, we came with Paul from here. We did this and we did this. And it is like all of the little towns here. We have the people from Madrid who are very proud of being from Madrid. We have Slater, Sheldahl, Huxley, Alleman, Woodward, Grander, everywhere. And we are all very proud of where we grew up. And sometimes we let that pride overshadow who we are and what we are doing. We forget that all of us are Christians. We forget that all of us have the same end goal. We want to share God's love. We want to reach out and help as many people as we can. And it doesn't matter; it shouldn't matter where we are from, or what we are doing, or who we are in these parts. When all that should matter is we are God's children. We are all God's children. It doesn't matter the rest of it. But we can not get past that sometimes. We can not get past that we grew up somewhere. That we have special privileges than others and it doesn't matter.

I don't know how many of you know who Jane Elliot is. She was a teacher in Riceville in the 60's. And in 1968, she started a little study that would be completely illegal now. She was a 3rd grade teacher and she took her class and she separated them into two very distinct groups, kids who had brown eyes and kids who had blue. And what she did was the first day she told the kids that the kids with brown eyes were special. A study had come out that these kids were the most wonderful people in the world. They were smarter, they were better athletes, they were more likely to hold better jobs, they were more likely to graduate from school, they were more likely to do all of these things. So she told them that the school board had decreed that these kids were going to get special treatment from now on. So they got all the good desks.

They got moved to the front of the classroom. They got a water fountain that said brown eyes only during the time it was very appropriate

And then the next day, they start the class and she is like okay all the brown eyed people were sitting up here, now you have to go to the back of the classroom. And they were all puzzled and she was like, I got it wrong. It is the blue eyed people who are to be up in the front of the class. It is the blue eyed people who are smarter than the rest. And so the blue eyed kids were all like this is awesome. We got treated like garbage and they ran to the front of the class. And the brown eyed kids were very angry. They didn't want to go back. But there was one kid, one kid in this entire class of 38 kids who both days said this isn't right. We are all the same. We are the same people. We are the same people we were a week ago. We are the same people we were yesterday. How we treat each other shouldn't rely on our eye color. What should matter is we do the right thing because we all believe in God. A 3rd grader is telling us this. Because he had it right. Nothing mattered about what our eye color was. It didn't matter where we are from. What mattered was that we all had God's love. That we were all his children. And he wanted to share that with everybody so show that we are all the same people. We can all reach out and help each other. That we can all do these things because God is here for all of us. He is here to share his love with all of us and the rest doesn't really matter.