Thinking Out Loud in These Divisive Times
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There are many thoughts and scripture passages that come to mind as I consider one side or another in these divisive times in the church.

I have considered the parable of the Lost Son and tried to figure out who fits with which characters and it isn’t always clear. I keep coming back to the fact that the Father shows amazing grace in dealing with both sons when it was within his rights to do otherwise.

I have thought of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

In times as divisive as these it is easy to start pointing the finger and judging others. It seems to me the message of this parable is that we are to leave that judgment to God and God will make that judgment when the time is right. Too often, perhaps in our impatience, we aren’t willing to wait for the right time. We just want it to be over with so we can move on.

I have a new appreciation for Jesus’ words when He says his Words will become a sword that divides. Oh, if we could only understand more fully and completely. We are certainly at a point when God’s Word is proving to be divisive. It, in my eyes, isn’t a case of the many sides ignoring the Bible but rather a case in which we look to different scriptures to make our arguments.

In the midst of all of this I am reminded of words that were shared at Synod School. Carol Howard Merritt shared that 18 percent of college students have never been in a church, which is an evangelism challenge. But she went on to point out that part of the reason the younger generations are ignoring the church is that they don’t want to have anything to do with our debates and controversies. They want to be a part of a church that helps them find meaning in their lives and supports them as they get involved in God’s mission to change the world.

It seems to me there are some things we can do in the midst of this divisive time which might help us stay together in Christian Community but also show the world how to behave in times of crisis and disagreement.

1. We need to listen to each other. That means we have to come to the conversation ready to accept that the other parties of the conversation have something to say that we might learn from. Don’t get too caught up in framing your rebuttal, but truly listen.

2. Pray daily for the people we disagree with. Don’t let your prayer manipulate God by asking them to be converted to your way of thinking and believing, but pray that their best interests will be considered and that your relationship with them might be renewed.

3. We need to be very cautious in the language we use. Avoid using “you, they, or them” language. This tends to depersonalize people. It also fosters the division and more clearly identifies sides. It is a way to hide our own thinking and feelings in of a vague “other.”
4. We need to avoid speaking to a third party about someone we should be speaking directly to. In times such as these there are often people we avoid talking with and they are often the very people we should be speaking to. Talk with not about.

5. We need to seek God’s will. When the sides are pretty clearly drawn it is far too easy to get caught up in converting the other side to our position assuming that we have the only (God’s) answer. Winning isn’t has critical as serving God’s will in times such as this. That doesn’t say it is easy to discern what God’s will is.

6. Is there a third way forward? Steven Covey was noted for using this language when discussing win-win solutions. The third way forward is probably God’s way which isn’t the way of either of us. Is there a way forward in which the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is served?

7. Finally, we need to be gracious, prayerful, forgiving and open to reconciliation. We need to love our neighbor and our enemy as ourselves. We need to find Christ in this situation so we can faithfully serve Him.