

Unity (July 22, 2018)

Ephesians 2:11-22; Psalm 23:1-6

Last week, I mentioned the CEO of Canadian Pacific Railway who said, “nobody’s gonna be forced to do anything,” “I’m not going to fire them,” and yet forced the rookie engineers into dangerous working situations. This week I will start with another CEO, CEO of Bellhops Moving Company, Luke Marklin, who is the former general manager of Uber. His name was not known to me until one of his employees, Walter Carr, did something wonderful.

Carr’s car broke down the night before his first day of work with Bellhops Moving Company. The job site was 20 miles away from where he lived. He decided to walk to the job site as he wanted to be on time on his first day of training. Carr began his walk around midnight. After walking for at least 14 miles, he got picked up by the police. Once the police heard his story, they took Carr to breakfast then gave him a ride to his job site. Carr had no intention to share this with others, but when his customer, Ms. Lamey, who received this service heard about this, she was so impressed that she started a “GoFundMe” to raise money for Carr to get a new vehicle. Soon, the CEO of the moving company got wind of Carr’s story. He met Carr personally and gave him his 2014 Ford Escape as a gift.

Was the CEO of the Canadian Pacific Railway unfair? Were his sayings being quoted out of context? Could it be possible that he didn’t know some of the company’s employees were not treated as fairly as he believed? As for the CEO of the moving company, were his actions driven by publicity and good press? Would other employees be treated the same when something similar happens? Regarding the above questions, we cannot get to the bottom of. Yet we know, the CEO of a company has a lot of power and it comes with a bigger room for the necessary strategic planning and negotiation.

When a person assumes the position of power and influence, what is that person supposed to do? Do we have a CEO in the church? I think there should be. But the CEO should not be any human being like us, since we fall easily into traps, like bigotry, complacency, favoritism etc., just to name a few. We can hardly find anyone who is perfect, but most of us have a good sense and sound judgment in practical matters, which we call common sense.

Let’s take our common sense to a test. Would a vegetarian eat meat? Of course not, otherwise they wouldn’t be called a vegetarian. That sounds logical and reasonable. However whether it’s true or not, it depends on how we define

“meat”. Should fish be considered meat? Some vegetarians do, some don’t. What about jelly-fish, clams and barnacles from the sea; bugs, ticks, mites, bacteria and yeast on land; insect and airborne microorganisms in the sky? Should they be considered meat simply because they have been classified in the past, in the present or in the future as part of the animal kingdom? We all have common sense, but common sense cannot be the absolute standard.

“Circumcised”, “Uncircumcised”, “People of God”, “Gentiles”, “Jewish outsiders”, “Jewish insiders” are all terms our culture has created. The good side of their existence is that people can come together, sharing common ideals and practices. The flip side of it, however, is that it can build walls between us. Jesus Christ paid the highest price that he could – his life – to reveal to us, that the walls for segregation are not necessary. If there’s a CEO among us, that would be Jesus. He knows the weaknesses and strengths of humanity. He knows us so well that he would only request one thing from us – repentance . In other words, it’s a request for a “reboot”, which simply means “Stop going that direction! Turn back!”

The mission and vision of Christian faith is to assume a new humanity together with others. It’s a goal set by our "CEO" who knows our ups and downs, both the enjoyable as well as the sorrowful moments. Our "CEO" wants us to live a new life – not for the sake of getting more publicity, or to please certain groups. The direction that Jesus shows us is the original purpose of God’s creation.

There is a perpetual misunderstanding that “nature” implies “goodness”. According to this misunderstanding, anything natural must also be good. That make some people think, “being natural” is “being good”. Is this thinking always right? Let me give you some examples: We shall all die. Do we all see death as good since it’s natural? “Getting fevers and pain are all natural.” Do we all see them as good? Why do we develop vaccines and medication? To a certain extent, we keep working against nature. Are vaccines and medication good then? If we argue further, holding that the development of vaccine and medication is our nature, then we must admit that our actions imply that our nature can act against the mother nature.

That’s the reason why when we talk about “unity”, which should not be reduced to “conformity”. Conformity means everybody has to do the same thing and behave in the same manner. “Unity” in Christ respects diversity. Nature can act against nature, just like we can disagree with each other. That’s also the order of God’s creation. The call to restart, to reboot, or to repent is an offer

from God for a chance to construct a spiritual building with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone so that all of us, who are so unique by nature, can be bound together by nothing but faith. This spiritual building is the holy temple in which God feel like home.

“A temple in which God feels like home”—does it sound strange? Yet it’s true. God does not feel like home in every temple! That’s why Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. A temple is a place where human beings can encounter God. Although it’s not the only place that can achieve that, that is its main purpose. Sacrifice keeps God and human beings apart. As Micah the prophet said, “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) Amos the prophet also said, “I hate, I despise your religious festivals.” (Amos 5:21)

We are that holy temple, built by us as the spiritual bricks and stones, each with very different nature. We shall build some kinds of wall with this building, but their purpose is not to segregate, but to hold – not to exclude, but to include. It’s unity with diversity. Amen