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A Word Audit

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When I find free moments to reflect on my life and ministry, I often think about the words I use to describe what I'm experiencing. If the words are positive, uplifting and energetic, I

know I feel good about what's going on. If they are negative, it's equally obvious. And if they are snarky (and, yes, that's a theologically appropriate term), I know there's something going on in me I need to figure out.

Quite frankly – and it's embarrassing to admit this – I don't like the negative words I've been choosing recently to describe the contentiousness that occurred at this year's Annual Conference, congregations complaining about “those people in Little Rock,” pastors expressing an entitlement attitude about their appointments, or all the talk about the future disintegration of the denomination. In fact, I deeply despise the fact that I have been mired in a sea of negative words when I talk about our church, people and future.

It's very different, however, when I think about the words I've been using to talk about the “Body of Christ.” Suddenly, it's like I'm talking about something that's the polar opposite of what I so often experience in the “church.” And my vocabulary reflects it as I invoke positive words that describe God-nods, Holy Spirit breakthroughs, reconciled relationships, the bright light of Christ shining, and the making of disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped and sent to transform lives, communities and the world.

So why do I speak negatively about the “church” and positively about the “Body of Christ”?

I think it has everything to do with whether we are acting like the church belongs to us or whether it belongs to Jesus. I instantly get negative about the “church” when we treat it like a human institution that we believe we're in charge of because, whenever that happens, we get what we've got – something far more reflective of the worst of humanity instead of the best of Christ. I speak positively about the “Body of Christ” when we are able to step back from our urge to control and are instead controlled far more by Jesus' heart and mind.

Of course, it's one thing for me to understand why I do what I do. It's quite another for me to do something about it. That's why I'm glad God has stepped in and convicted me in a way that will keep me from throwing up my arms at the overwhelming impossibility of the task and just walking away.

And because God has stepped in, here is what I intend to do.

I will divest myself of the notion that I can fix the “church” because I somehow live under the delusion that I am in charge. Rather, my vocation will be to experience the “church” more and more as the “Body of Christ” in which I experience Jesus as our literal and spiritual head who directs our life together. And while I don't know what the future of our beloved United Methodist Church is going to be, I do know that this way of being “church” offers a wonderful opportunity to be part of a group of people who live in true love, joy, justice, new life, resurrection, healing and hope.

And that's more than enough for me.