

July 11, 2017

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

In Sunday's sermon, I quoted the well-known preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor, and afterwards, several of you asked me about it.

The quote came from her book, *Leaving Church*, wherein she talked about "the church" and the reasons people leave "the church," and it supported the point I was trying to make in responding to this week's questions in our summer preaching series: What about the church? Why bother with church? Why do I need the church?

Here is a more expansive quotation of what Taylor has to say:

I believe there are good reasons to leave a church. There are probably even some good reasons to leave the church altogether, but when the main reason is that I cannot find a community of faith that agrees with me on everything from what kind of music we should sing to where we should stand on the death penalty, then I have the perfect excuse never to belong to a church with more than one member – me.

There is no perfect church, any more than there is a perfect God, if perfect means that I understand, agree, or approve of everything that goes on. If you become a Christian, you get a Bible that says God helped Joshua exterminate whole tribes of people right down to the last baby. You get a household code that makes wives subject to their husbands and tells husbands to sacrifice themselves for their wives. You also get the parable of the prodigal son and the 23rd psalm.

If you become an Episcopalian, you get a national church heavy with all the usual bureaucracy. You get bishops who will not ordain women and people who still want to fight about the 1928 prayer book. You also get liturgies so lovely they take your breath away and a commitment to common prayer that puts all our divisions to shame.

Wherever people are people, there will always be things to offend. Some of the things we should pursue until we get some agreement on them, and others we should probably leave alone – so that they can go on reminding us that there are other people in this world, just as sincere as we are, who do not see things our way. We need each other, to save us from righteousness. We also need each other to help keep us in shape for God. Because wherever God is God, there will always be things to offend. Like Jesus. Like fleshy bread and bloody wine. Like this church we call Christ's body, in which we are grafted to each other as surely as we are grafted to him.

Do you wish to go away sometimes? Of course you do. We all do. But where else would we go? This is where we have heard to words of eternal life. This is where we have come to believe and know the Holy One of God. With treasures like those at hand, what offense can we not bear?

See you in church,

Andrew