

Cindy Roehrkaase: 10/15/19

Diversity

Recently our church has reminded me of a conversation I had with my sister, a very successful business woman, about diversity. She told me seven or eight years ago that when building teams for the different projects she manages she always looks to bring in people with different gifts, personalities, skill sets, and areas of expertise. The variety of opinions, even when they conflict, help generate creativity and thinking out of the box, the result being innovative solutions. I remember thinking then, maybe that was God's idea when He created the church.

As I looked around last Sunday morning, of the 45 or so people present, at least 10 different nationalities were represented. What this means is there is was no common mother-tongue, and in one case no common language. The cultural, religious and educational backgrounds varied as well as our approach to the One who has brought us together. I would love to say at this point, "it was wonderful to see God working so powerfully". Whereas I do believe God was and is working powerfully, my experience is, His "working" often takes me out of my comfort zone. You know... the zone where we *think* we are in control. (As I age, my compassion for the Israelite's during their desert trek grows).

This is not the first time God has done this with me in the 36 years I have lived in Germany. As I have leaned into God over the years, often in fear, He has given me some questions to ponder that calm my spirit and help me rest in Him. The first question is: "Who is in charge here?" When the need appears so great, more than I can possibly give, to then be able to honestly say, "Thank Heaven it's not me!!", is balm for my spirit. Like the disciples distributing the bread and fish to over 5000 people in Mark 6, I do have a responsibility. God, however, is the only one who can know their needs and not just fulfill them, but fill to overflowing. How many baskets did the disciples fill when it was all over? So in my situation *part* of my responsibility is to simply trust that God is doing what He has promised He would do, care for His people.

The second question focuses on another part of my responsibility. My emphasis for many years has been on doing the right things. Don't misunderstand me, what we do is important, but it's about so much more. Mark 6:51 describes the disciples' astonishment after the storm calms, as Jesus gets into their boat. But Mark goes on to say that their astonishment is the result of having, "gained no insight from the incident of the loaves, because their hearts were hard. I believe the disciples here had an excuse. The Holy Spirit had not yet come. So what's the second question? Do I *recognize*, can I *see* God and His workings in the circumstances of my life? Will I allow them to move me toward love, compassion and understanding (soft) rather than fear, contempt and judgment (hard).

My initial reaction to being pushed out of my comfort zone, is to protect (i.e. harden) my heart. What makes me uncomfortable? Well....anything or person that leaves me feeling "I have no influence over the outcome of this situation", or experiencing what seems to me an overwhelming amount of need, and my hands are tied and/or conflict, pretty much of any kind.

Only the Holy Spirit's continual and intense outpouring of His "heart-softening oil" enables me to *be* who He wants me to be, when we as a church in all of our diversity come together, whether there are two or three of us or 50. Yes, there are things for me to do, but more importantly it's about *being* a channel for His love. This is only possible when I value and protect my time alone with the bridegroom of the church in His chambers. Only here can our hearts be softened, our eyes opened and it is here where we gain insight.

I would love to say this is where I live, but it's not....yet! Pray for me as I will for you that we learn to delight in living in His presence.