



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Pastor's Page – May 2016

“And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”- John 13:34-35

[Sunday, April 24, was Pulpit Exchange Sunday for the Ellwood City ministerium. Rev. Elizabeth Wallace preached about Jesus' crucifixion at FUMC. I'm sorry I wasn't there to hear her sermon. I was preaching at Bell Memorial on the above scripture from John. Since you weren't there to hear my sermon, I'm offering a condensed version here. The companion lesson from the lectionary was Acts 11. It recounts an event engineered by God to instruct Peter that he was to set aside his personal prejudices and offer Jesus to a Roman army officer named Cornelius and his family.]

Brands play an important role in our lives. In my case, I was raised on Cheerios and Crest toothpaste among other brand name products. The Apostle Peter was raised on Judaism. What we have in common is that these brands met our needs. We knew we could rely on them. Sometimes, however, brands change. For instance, the Tetley tea box I knew as a child is now blue and green instead of red. Breyer's vanilla ice cream doesn't taste the way it used to. The recipe has changed. You could also say that God changed brands. God's new brand is Jesus Christ.

Changing brands can be upsetting for those who were satisfied with the old ones. I was fine with Tetley being in a red box. I liked the way Breyer's used to taste. Similarly, Peter was fine with Judaism. He relied on obedience to the Law of Moses to put him and his community in good standing with God.

But God made it clear to Peter in a vision that God's brand was changing. It was now for non-Jews, and not just for Jews only. That upset Peter at first. But through a series of events [Acts 10-11], Peter came to understand the change that had taken place. It became obvious to him when he obeyed God's instructions to go to Cornelius's home to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Peter said, "It is clear that God gave those Gentiles the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; who was I, then, to try to stop God!?" Suddenly Cornelius and his household were able to enjoy the same brand as Peter; by becoming baptized believers.

If God's brand is Jesus, then the primary ingredient of that brand is LOVE. To be Jesus' disciple is to LOVE. [John 13:34-35] Using Peter and Cornelius as our example, Jesus' brand sees possibilities in people and loves them as they are. Jesus' brand reaches out with love, rather than wait for others to come to us. Jesus' brand makes connections with people by loving them without worrying about what anybody else thinks. To do anything less is to go off-brand.

As FUMCEC gets ready to change pastors, I hope you will remember to stay on-brand. Use this time to strengthen our brand. Jesus is what we and the whole world need. Jesus is the one on whom we can always rely.

Pastor Pat