

Is It Raining or Sprinkling

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Dr. Michael Helms

October 15, 2017

In a two-minute video posted by the “Huffington Post” a few years ago, three very young children argue about whether it is raining or sprinkling. The video went viral. This will be acted out today before the sermon by three people playing the roles of children. Here is the script.

Boy 1: It sprinkling.

Girl 1: No, it’s raining.

Boy 1: No, it’s sprinkling. *(Boy lightly touches the girls face with both hands.)*

Girl 1: No, it raining.

Boy 1: My mother says it’s sprinkling. *(He says this with some anger in his voice.)*

Girl 1: My mommy says it’s raining.

Boy 1: No, it sprinkling.

Girl 1: No, it’s raining.

Boy 1: No, it’s sprinkling.

Girl 1: Because my mommy says it’s raining! *(As she says this, she points at the boy and slightly pokes him in the face.)*

Boy 1: Ouch, you poked me.

Girl 2: You need to stop.

Boy 1 to Girl 2: It’s sprinkling outside Macy.

Girl 2: It’s raining.

Boy 1: No, it’s not! You’re not real. I’m real.

Girl 2: Watch, let’s go out there and see.

Boy 1: Erin, it’s raining! *(He raises his voice again.)*

(Did you catch that? These two girls have totally confused the little fellow of his original argument.)

Girl 1: Because it’s raining.

Boy 1: No, it’s not. It’s raining. *(He’s still confused.)*

Girl 1: It’s raining! *(As she says this she pokes him in the chest.)*

Boy 1: Ouch!

Girl 2: Are you O.K.? *(She puts her hand to his heart.)*

Girl 1: It’s raining! It’s raining!

Boy 1: You poked me in my heart. *(He turns around to hide his face.)*

Girl 2: Are you O.K.? *(Tries to console him.)*

Boy 1: She poked me in my heart.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/25/kids-argue-rain-sprinkling-_n_5881080.html

When I watch videos of town hall meetings with members of the public meeting their congressmen, I am convinced that we haven’t progressed much beyond the ability of these children to argue whether it was raining or sprinkling.

Many times, the arguments seem about as substantive and the level of banter is about the same.

Where has civility gone?

Is it possible any more to be on opposite sides of issues and have a conversation where people share opposing viewpoints without getting personal and without it ending with a poking contest where someone gets wounded?

To keep an opposing voice from being heard people will appeal to a higher authority or the use of power. People will raise their voices, use fear, try to intimidate, and bully.

I received an email from a friend that's having some conflict in his work not long ago he said, "The attacks have become personal." In other words, people are no longer talking about the issues. Now they are simply trying to hurt my friend and his family.

People think that have scored a victory when they poke people to the point that they penetrated their hearts.

Some people think submission is the goal. People believe the goal is to win the argument and any cost, not seek the best for all concerned, as does one part of Rotary's 4-Way Test.

It's check and check mate. That's the goal, to defeat the opponent, smear them in the ground, run him or her off. If that is the case, we must not care if we have a relationship with or opponent or not.

Our political world is a mess now because this is the way people operate.

Too many churches are shadowing the political ways. We have stumbled along the way because people within the churches have argued about whether the communion cups should be plastic or glass or whether we should sing the Doxology or not whether the color of the church carpet should be green or red.

In the 1890s there was a small Baptist church in Mayfield County, Kentucky. The church had two deacons who were constantly arguing and bickering over some issue or the other.

One of them put up a small wooden peg on the back wall so the pastor could hang up his hat. When the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged. "How dare you put a peg in the wall without first consulting me!"

The people in the church took sides and the congregation eventually split. Today the residents of Mayfield County still refer to the two churches as Peg Baptist Church and Anti-Peg Baptist Church.

(<http://denhigh.org/tucks-blog/where-we-hang-our-hat/>)

Look, this kind of stuff is as old as the church. It will likely continue as long as there is such a thing. I am not naïve enough to think that I'll ever get all of you to think alike on all issues related to theology, or church decor, or how you think we ought to do church.

That's not even a goal of mine. We are Baptists, after all. Part of the beauty of fabric of who we are is the freedom to disagree. By nature, we are different. We are drawn together because we are not all the same or have to be.

However, there is a difference in disagreeing and being disagreeable.

I'd like to appeal to your grown up mature side and ask you to do something that's beneficial for the future or our church. I'd like to ask to ask you to keep the most important thing front and center and try not to sweat the small stuff.

Whether it's raining or it's sprinkling should not matter that much. It's still precipitation. One will make you wetter than the other, but in the end, God is still blessing the earth. If it's flooding, perhaps that's different. Raining, sprinkling, or flooding, we should not be wounding each other.

Paul told the church of Ephesus. "Stop being bitter and angry at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ. Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God." (Ephesians 4:31-5:2 CEV).

Why would Paul be writing this to the church of Ephesus unless he was getting reports that things like this were taking place?

If you have been in church very long, you probably know someone who got poked in the heart by another church member and they vowed they weren't going back to church. You may even know someone who hasn't returned.

Granted, some people use that as an excuse not to attend church.

We know that should happen among us but the church is more of a hospital for sinners than it is a house for saints. Occasionally, it happens.

If you were offended by a cashier at a supermarket, you wouldn't stop buying groceries, would you?

Some people might change supermarkets because they don't like repairing relationships. But why drive across town because of one cashier that might have had a bad day or needs an attitude adjustment? Why not look at it as a witnessing opportunity?

It is true that some church members are like the little girl in our skit this morning. When they wound, some don't apologize.

The boy was just as much at fault, if not more. He stopped talking about the weather and got personal.

“I’m real. You’re not,” he said.

He tried to wound. His arrow just didn’t penetrate as easily.

Sometimes the goal for people is to win and if they wound others or chase them away off to protect their idea, space, or position, then that is considered a win.

My grandfather’s house was in a small curve with a little rise that made crossing the street dangerous. He had a jealous dog that took advantage of this. Yep, a jealous dog.

This dog didn’t seem to like any other dog competing for affection. Now whether this was real or imagined I cannot say, but someone noticed that every time my grandfather got a new dog, his old collie would lead it across the road at the very time a car was topping the hill.

The old experienced jealous dog always made it across. The new dogs were not so lucky and they all went to dog heaven.

I know some of you have some work spaces like this. People are very jealous about their work space. A rookie comes in and instead of making him feel welcomed and at home, they make sure he knows his or her place. They want that person to understand how hard they’ve worked to get to where they are and he or she better respect their position. If not, they make it clear he or she might get ran over.

While the world works devious like that jealous dog, the people of the church should be noticeably different.

While we learn that we have jealousy and anger within us, we come here to confess those aspects of who we are and to learn new ways of relating to one another and to the world. Paul uses words like kindness, mercy, and forgiveness.

We all need the emotional maturity to realize that our relationships with each other affect the entire body of Christ.

We are all connected. If you have a relationship that is not healthy in the church, it is not possible for you to isolate that relationship between you and that person. The poison of anger, mistrust, disappointment, and betrayal seeps out of your relationship and into other parts of the congregation.

We are a part of a body. You cannot isolate one part of your body without it affecting all of us.

If a you get an infection in your finger, it will affect your entire body.

By the same token, we contribute to the strength of the body when our relationships with everyone in the body remain healthy and strong.

That doesn't mean we must agree about everything. It just means that we must be kind and merciful, and forgiving in all that we do.

So now church, after preaching for eight weeks and getting you ready to write our future story, I want you to pray for an incredible and undeniable unity within this body.

Many of you have prayed in groups of three. Others of you have prayed on your own for discernment as we move forward.

In January, we will begin to write our future story. The process will take 120 days. Let's remember that everyone's ideas are important and valuable. Everyone needs to be heard.

No one should be attacked. In the marketplace of ideas, some ideas will be more valuable than others, but that doesn't mean that the person offering the idea is more valuable.

Remember, it may come from your mouth, but ultimately, this process belongs to God.

In biblical times mosaics were popular. Many have been unearthed in archeological digs in homes and in public places that date back thousands of years. Mosaics were pictures or patterns made from small colored pieces of hard material, usually made from small pieces of square stone, tile or glass.

I'd like to think of our future story as a mosaic. Each of you has a piece of the future story, whether it is through an idea, through your affirmation, or through your participation.

God has given it to you. It's in your heart. It will be expressed by faith. You will put it into practice.

You have a deep love for this church. You have a deep love for God.

Every one of you wants a future that is special, something only God can make happen among us.

You want a future that is inspiring, something that makes you want to invest your time, money and life into.

You want a future that blesses our community, something that causes our children and teenagers to want to serve God and know God.

You want a future that changes the lives of family, something that makes worship alive and special.

You want a future that makes our church continue to matter in the lives of the poor and needy.

You want a future that lets the community know that we care about all people regardless of what decisions they have made, what they look like, or what they have done.

You want a future that where missions continue to be our passion.

You want a future where every person that walks through these doors matter to us.

You want a future where our facilities matches the dreams and hopes of our potential.

You want a future where we continue to baptize those who confess Christ.

Each one of you holds a piece of this future.

For it to become a beautiful mosaic, you need to be willing to offer it, while at the same time being willing to listen to what others have to offer.

If you are more concerned about your agenda than you are about listening and seeing all the other pieces of the mosaic, we will spend a lot of time arguing about whether it's raining or sprinkling.

Your piece of the mosaic is important, but what is most important is the finished product, the complete picture, the picture that God wants to emerge. For that reason, I invite you to offer your piece of the mosaic with these words, "Not my will, but yours will be done, Lord."

Pray that God will help us emerge with the picture of the future He wants us to have, one that we can all embrace and share with our friends and strangers with excitement and joy.

Then, instead of getting lost in the pettiness of trying to decide if it is raining or sprinkling, let's work toward being in agreement that the love of God is being poured out upon us in great measure, empowering us "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that (God has commanded us) Matthew 28:19-20a.

© Copyright 2017 by John Michael Helms