

June 21, 2019

Along the Way: Rehearsing

It used to be that the word “harmony” meant agreement. According to Gil Rendle in *Quietly Courageous*, life was in harmony when individuals sublimated their differences in order to create uniformity. But the meaning of “harmony” has shifted. Harmony is not everyone singing the same note rather it is when everyone sings their own note and then listens closely enough to blend their note into a song. Where once harmony meant being alike, harmony now means being respectfully different.

There are other words that need to be reexamined in today’s world. “Representation” is such a word. At one time “representation” meant the opportunity to claim the attention and preferences of one’s own subgroup and to negotiate in favor of one’s own perspective. “Representation” in the church or in the service of the whole body needs a different definition. One is invited to the table not to argue for one’s own preferred outcome but to bring one’s own truth to the conversation in the service of the whole body.

Representation calls for more careful listening than forceful talking. It’s not a contest over outcomes but a shared discovery of how best to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus. For a church the size of Plymouth, there are many differences to respect and it takes a commitment to weave discordant voices into harmony. Beautiful harmony takes some rehearsal. Let’s keep practicing.

—Paula Northwood