

Based on 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

I had a lot of fun this week thinking about our time in the service when we acknowledge the children in our midst.

You know the time I mean?

That very brief time when we form a circle with them here in the center of the sanctuary.

That brief time when we say a prayer a quick 'hello' or maybe a word about our theme for the morning.

Or maybe just a quick blessing as they head off to Church School.

For me, when the children and their leaders come forward, it often feels like God is holding us all, that is you, the larger worshipping circle, you, the folks in the pews and you the folks in the choir stalls, God is holding all of us in God's tender embrace.

Even when the children and their leaders go off to another part of the building for their learning time together, it still feels as though we are all held together in God's embrace.

This idea of being held in God's embrace as we form 'circles' of ministry connected by a common purpose, a common vision, is also at the heart of this morning's text in Scripture.

This morning's text comes to us from a portion of a letter written by the Apostle Paul to one of his early church communities, the community at Corinth, the ones known as The Corinthians.

The people at Corinth were a challenged and challenging community of believers struggling to follow in the Way of Jesus.

Within their circle were a couple of subsets, sub 'circles', if you will, of believers, some of whom had come to think of themselves as more important or as having more value than others in the community.

Some within the one sub 'circle' were struggling with differences in importance as relates to wealth and to poverty.

Others in a second sub 'circle' were struggling with differences in importance as relates to the manifestation of certain spiritual gifts.

The sum total of these struggles, this fractiousness, this need to compete and self organize in stratified ways was that the larger community's sense of being interconnected was being eroded.

We might even go so far as to say that this divisiveness based on needing to outrank one another, had the power to blow their community apart at the seams.

But, this is where the Apostle Paul's pastoral response, his affectionate, but firm response, and his clear but unswerving conviction of the need to focus on God's presence is what compels him to write his community an important letter. (1)

This is the context of this morning's reading from scripture, this portion of Paul's letter written for the people at Corinth.

Here, Paul reminds the Corinthians, and by extension, us sitting here, that being in Christian community, Christ-centered community is different than any other.

Being in Christian community means this: 'if one member of the body suffers, all suffer together with it' and 'if one member of the body is honoured, all rejoice together with it'. (2)

Being in intentional Christian community requires us to put our egos on the shelf.

Being about the intentional building of Christian community will cost something.

The Apostle Paul came by this wisdom in his own call.

Paul's call to the community to honour unity in the midst of diversity emerges out of his own experience of conversion and call.

Or to quote, Frederick Buechner, in his book "Wishful Thinking, a Seeker's ABC, "Jesus lit the fire, and Paul used it to forge for him a church." (3, p. 83).

Just so, Paul's call to the community to honour unity in the midst of diversity echoes across the ages.

This morning as our Welcome Back-Stepping Forward theme continues to unfold, we will be inviting you to do just that-to be acknowledged for the diversity of gifts

you bring to the building up of the body of Christ and to then metaphorically step forward with us to find your place in this community of believers.

Together, we want to affirm and acknowledge, not only our individual calls but, also, our interdependence, and our interconnectedness as a community learning to love like Jesus in this time and in this place.

As you listen, be sure to be attentive to how God might be calling you to respond in life giving and life receiving ways.

After worship this morning, everyone here is warmly invited to join with each other for a time of fellowship and refreshment in our church hall.

Friends, the good news for today is this: It is good to be together!

It is good to gather in intentional ways, to celebrate all that we have been, and all that we hope to become.

It is good to be together in ever widening and overlapping circles, not only needed, but also interconnected as the body of Christ in this time and in this place.

It is good to know that when our all too human tendency to compare and compete, to stratify and create divisions, God pulls back from the brink of our own self absorption.

It is good to know that God is with us in all our fears and all our foibles.

It is good to know that God calls us beyond our own small concerns.

Indeed, God calls us to let go all that divides us one from the other and to remember instead that we are all needed, all valued, and all interconnected by our common purpose and common vision in the building of God's kingdom.

My fondest prayer is that we might be able to see ourselves and each other as not only welcome but interdependent, and interconnected as members in the body of Christ today, tomorrow, and always.

May it be so, amen and amen!

*This morning' homily takes some of its impetus from the following resources:

- (1) THE MESSAGE//REMIX, THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE, NAVPRESS, 2006, by Eugene H. Peterson, p.1667
- (2) Harper Collins Study Bible, NEW STANDARD REVISED VERSION, HarperCollins, p. 2157
- (3) Wishful Thinking, A Seeker's ABC, Revised and Expanded, Frederick Buechner, 1993