

January 24 2016 Year C Third Sunday after epiphany

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 19:1-6, 14

I Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

Sermon *The BIG Picture*

We are going to have an up-to-date visual for our sermon today. (The pastor placed an interesting painting in front of the congregation.)

While living near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I had a membership to the Philadelphia Museum of Art which is among the top three art museums in the country along with the national galleries in Washington and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. So the Philadelphia Art Museum has a tremendous is collection of late 19th and early 20th centuries French Impressionisms like artist like Monet, Mame, Cezanne, Renoir, and Van Gogh. Naturally it was difficult not to be drawn in by each artist's use of color and texture and composition. This painting represented a view which is difficult, I think, to put into words. In addition to the aesthetic value, the word that I discovered there was a kind of science involved in the impressionism which was in some ways percussive to optical effects of some television and printing technology of several years ago based on what we used to call the dot metric principal. In other words we can look at distance and we can see a complete image on the screen or on a piece of printed material but if we were to look more closely even microscopically, in some cases, we would see that these images is made up of intricate patterns of individual dots all put together in such a way as to form a total image. Now for those of you who know anything about science, you know, I have simplified every last bit of this but impressionistic painting as I see it works on a similar principal. In this water color by my good old college friend Kathy who was an art major demonstrates what I am talking about. It is called the Mexican Lunch Guest. It was painted back in the ancient days of in the 1970s. And if you looked at it and other impressionistic style painting close up you can easily see that they are made up in some cases of a dozens of individual splashes of color and that is about all there is, it looks like if you look at it really close up but if you step back and you get the sense of the big picture, the total image, the full affect of the unified beauty of the painting comes pouring out on the senses. And not until we sense this full effect can we fully appreciate it as a work of art that it is before us.

The concept of many small parts coming together to make the full central impression painting is also I think the absolute essential to our understand of the church, especially the United Church of Christ congregation like the one in which

we worship. Like the impressionistic painting we contain an awful lot of diversity, I don't know if you have noticed that or not. We are made up of hundreds of small bits of theology position, preference, and style, in history and in personalities and family relationships, just try talking about someone and finding out about the family relationship and even color but unlike the painting the inconsistencies of who we are, are constantly moving and changing in form and compositions so much so that it is difficult to fit an individual within our organization to get a sense of what that big picture is all about; that is the true picture of who we really are and how others around us see us and who as individuals in the congregations, are called to be by God. After all we might not be the same church today that we were yesterday, let alone five years ago when I first came here nor will it be the same church that we will in five years into the future either. As a result that sometimes we as individual parts of the Newport UCC church look at our life together with our own particular set of glasses, we might view situations, some events, some people quite differently than how our brothers and sisters see us as a church family. Our way of seeing God working in the world, and the way of relating to the people around us; or our vision of our mission in this community and beyond this community might be different in small or even significant ways from one another and the reality is, it could cause and continue to cause hard feelings from time to time; personality clashes, even divisions in the life of our church family. Now obviously some of this is pretty natural stuff when after all, if you look at the way our individual families' function or any organization involves with human beings, we know that trying to work together toward a common goal is really no bed of roses at all. Think about marriage alone, in terms of that. On the other hand not having the ability to step back and not having the ability to see that big picture can have devastating consequences as well.

St Paul wrote beautifully, he wrote almost comically of this whole human phenomenon, in this passage that Nina shared with us from 1 Corinthians 12 this morning. St Paul pointed out the practical standpoint of using the image of the human body as to how essential each part, each function, each gift, each individual can be to the body which we call a church. He also pointed out how ridiculous and how dangerous it can be when parts of the body, when individuals themselves break off or they accuse others saying the rest of the body is not all that important to God's work in the world. St. Paul puts it this way, God has so arranged the body giving the greater honor to the inferior members so that there may be no dissension in the body, that the members of the body have the same care for each other; if one member suffers all members suffer together with it and if one member is honored all rejoice together with it. We are convinced St. Paul that we have the truth, if we read the book of Acts and some of Paul's letters, my take, is that when I read some of these passages that he saw that division is the greatest enemy of all.

So what is the body to do? Step back and look at the Big Picture. What in the world is the beauty of the whole art painting together? So St Paul continuing with his body language, it would seem that the larger church and the individual congregations like ours should be the image of what? It should be the body of Jesus. The body of Christ is something that we don't rip to pieces at will. He goes on to say just that in the next chapter, which really ought to be connected to this one, chapter 13, that love is the key. Love with a good dose of humility trumps that we should be right all the time, trumps that we have the direct pipe line to the mind of God or any kind of image that justified the meanings of, take no prisoners, type of mentality.

And then comes from Jesus himself in Luke chapter 4 to put the icing on the cake and it doesn't take long for us to see if we are to give ourselves the name Christian and we are called to be very best of our ability to rally around him, to rally around Jesus as he seeks to build this body not as a infallibility Bible, not a business model not a political ideology but Jesus' agenda as quoted from Isaiah chapter 61- good news to the poor and poor in spirit in this world, release those captives by myriads of chains in this world; recovery for those who are physically and spiritual unhealthy; freedom for those held down by their own actions or unjust systems in the world around them, and finally the joy and hope of the this life and the life to come.

You know practically speaking it is pretty easy if we pull our energy and we work together day in and day out as a congregation to lose our perspective and also down right lose our patience from time to time sometimes as we seek to do God's good work in the world around us and so when that happens I think it is a pretty good idea to just stop, breath in deeply, bite your tongue from time to time, to take a step back and just take a good look at that Big Picture. And together we say AMEN.