

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**January 26, 2025, The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany**

Psalm 19 (The Message Translation), I Corinthians 12:12-31a

**The Risk of Unity in Diversity, A Story**

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away,

and yet not so very far away at all, there lived a gathering of beings.

If you looked at them you could tell that they were very different from each other; it was clear that they did not belong together.

Truth be told, it was hard to imagine them ever coming together at all,

because you see they looked different from each other,

they were different shapes, different colors, different sizes,

they acted differently,

they held on to different truths,

they were good at very different things.

So, they stayed with their own kind, because it was familiar, and it was comfortable, and it was for the best. The way they saw it, this was exactly what the Creator wanted for them.

Some of the beings could smell chocolate cookies that were just coming out of the oven. They could tell the difference between a spring hyacinth and a spring lilac. They knew the salty smell of the ocean, the pine scent of the forest, and the tangy scent of an orange that has just been peeled. They were called noses.

Now there were other beings who knew what it sounded like when the wind whistled through tall prairie grasses and tall evergreens, or gusted on the edge of a tornado. They could hear a cardinal's song, a goose's honk, and even the beating wings of a hovering hummingbird. They were called ears.

Some of the beings were all about movement, most of the time. They skipped, they danced, they hopped, they ran, they could walk slowly or quickly, they could click their heels, and they could travel great distances; they could take you places. They were called feet.

Then there were the hands. They could tell the difference between a Siamese cat and a St. Bernard puppy. They felt the river's cold water on a hot summer's day, and the warm mug of cocoa on a winter's day like today. They knew how cold a snowball was, how sharp a cactus quill was, and how rough sandpaper felt on their fingertips. They were also known for holding onto things, and sometimes not letting go.

There were beings who could create music, without any instrument except themselves. They knew the spicy taste of a jalapeño pepper, the juicy sweetness of a summer peach, and the tart surprise of a lemon. They were made for speaking words, for yodeling, for savoring a cherry popsicle on a hot summer day, for blowing raspberries, and for singing folk, jazz, rock, classical, and rap music. They were called mouths.

As you can see these were beings of great diversity and great giftedness. They could make things happen!

They looked different from each other,

they were different shapes, different colors, different sizes,  
 they acted differently,  
 they held on to different truths,  
 and they were good at very different things.

And these are only a few of the types of beings who lived in this land.

I haven't even told you about the lungs, the knees, the hearts, or the brains,  
 and so many more.

But those are stories for another day.

In that land that is far, far away,

and yet not so very far away at all, there was a rumor of an invitation that had been  
 going around for years.

The invitation was about something called a "body;" a body they were all  
 invited to join together.

Some would say it wasn't a rumor at all, but a living nightmare.

Others said it seemed like it might be a good thing, if it was true.

Sometimes parents used this rumor to threaten their children.

Other people said that if the rumor was true, it would take a lot of modifying before they  
 would ever consider it.

Some were so bold as to say that the Creator was behind the rumor.

Actually, maybe it is better to say that this rumor was really an invitation that had been offered  
 to these beings year after year, as long as anyone could remember.

The rumor, or invitation, depending on your perspective, was terrifying, or energizing, or just  
 plain ridiculous.

No one was sure where this rumor began. It seemed like it had always been around.

Sometimes it seemed like the rumor was a part of them, as though something had hidden it deep  
 inside them at creation.

The invitation said that a body was something that was made up of all them, all together, in  
 one place, at the same time.

The very thought usually made the eyes close, the mouths sputter  
 and the noses sniff in a way that let you know that they found the whole idea to  
 be distasteful and ridiculous.

Now clearly you can see the reason that this rumor had never become a reality. The way they  
 had always lived in that land far, far away, had always worked. Noses stayed with noses, eyes with  
 eyes, ears with ears.

There was no mixing, no blending, no sharing, no collaboration, "just the way the Creator had  
 intended it!"

It was a rumor, a fairytale meant to scare children,  
 an idea that threatened all that was good and right and true.

What kind of land would they be if there were these bodies everywhere?

But late at night, when no one else was around, sometimes the noses thought about it  
 together. What if, when they were telling the difference between a spring hyacinth and a spring lilac,  
 they had eyes to see what they looked like? They'd heard of colors called purple and yellow and

pink, but they didn't know what that meant.

Sometimes, late at night, when no one else was around, the ears thought about it too. What actually made the sounds of a cardinal's song or a hummingbird's wings? What did a cat purring feel like? What did the wind in prairie grasses look like?

But then in the morning, wiser ones would prevail and list all the problems with this thing called a body.

What if all of them came together and had to cooperate all the time?

Hands and feet and noses and eyes and ears and all the other beings, all in one place at one time, connected to each other?

Who would be in charge?

Who would be the most important?

Could they kick someone out once they were joined together?

What if one part seemed just too different?

What if their ideas of truth and reality didn't match?

What if they didn't always like each other?

What if they couldn't agree?

What if being united didn't make them happy?

What if...what if....what if....?

But still that rumor, or invitation, pulsed inside each of them. There it was, just beyond the scent of pine forests, the skipping dance steps, the whistling wind, the feel of a Siamese cat's purr, the tang of a lemon, and the sight of the moon at night.

That invitation came to a land where:

They looked different from each other,

they were different shapes, different colors, different sizes,

they acted differently,

they held on to different truths,

and they were good at very different things.

The invitation beckoned with possibilities and with uncertainties.

How would life change with unity?

Would they recognize their land anymore?

Would they recognize themselves and "their" kind?

Would their differences make a difference?

Did they really need each other?

What would it be like for a nose to care for an ear, or a hand for a mouth?

Could an ear taste sound, or a hand see beauty?

What would be asked of them if they were in a body together?

If they were beings in relationship with each other, would a nose still be a nose, an ear an ear?<sup>1</sup>

In that land, far, far away, and not so very far away at all,

The invitation to come together beckoned:

With threat, with possibility, with challenge, with creativity, and most especially, with love.

<sup>1</sup>“After baptism we are more than just ourselves; we are by definition beings-in-relationship. ...the Spirit of God remains the source of the life, the breath of the church, moving among us and within us.” Bartlett, David L. and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 1 Advent Through Transfiguration*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009, p. 281.2 & 283.2

cf: SER-19-01-27