

East Hartford 1/26/14 by Rev. Paulette Harwood

I Corinthians 1:9-18 – Psalm 27 – Matthew 4:12-23

We give you thanks, O God of Sacred Stories, for the witness of Holy Scripture. Through it you nurture our imaginations, touch our feelings, increase our awareness and challenge our assumptions. Bless, we pray, our hearing of your word this day. Speak to each of us, speak to all of us. And grant that by the power of your Spirit we may be hearers and doers of your word. Amen.

### “Koinonia”

“God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The other day I was sitting in my favorite spot beside the bay window... going over some of the notes I'd been making on this morning's lessons... when something spectacular happened... Well at least it seemed pretty spectacular to me.

It has to do with the solar rainbow maker I'd gotten for Christmas... You may have seen something similar in one of those toy catalogues that get stuffed into our mailboxes every Fall. The little kid in me has always wanted one... so this year I decided to put it on my wish list.

Fixed to a window with a suction cup... a small solar panel harnesses sunshine to power a simple generator that sets a variety of gears into motion... eventually rotating 2 octagonal prisms dangling below.

The entire mechanism is encased in clear plastic so that not only do you get to marvel at the dancing rainbows reflected all over the floor and ceiling and everything in between... it's also fascinating to watch all the gears working in harmony and doing their part to put on a fabulous light show... That is... when it works!

You see... even though I've placed my solar rainbow maker in the sunniest window in the house...that's my south facing bay window... it had never really worked for more than 30 seconds... EVER!

But I leave it up in the window anyway... not only to remind me of the thoughtfulness of the giver...

...but every once in a while...

...if the sun's rays hit those prisms just right...

...I might catch a glimpse of a rainbow or two somewhere in the room. So you can imagine just how surprised I was to suddenly see tiny multihued sparkles twirling and swirling across my notebook and the rest of the room.

If gazing at that strobing display wasn't enough to distract me... (and sadly while I'm writing a

sermon it is WAY TOO EASY for me to be distracted)... for almost an hour it was mesmerizing to watch those gears move... each a different color... each a different size... each moving in different directions as they were designed... yet all working together with such a beautifully spectacular result.

As I sat there watching... I wondered how this toy might be a metaphor for what Paul was getting at in this morning's epistle lesson.

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Whenever two or more are gathered... the possibility that differences will develop into disagreements... and disagreements into factions... always exists... And much to his dismay... that's what Paul discovered was happening in Corinth.

Paul reminded the congregation that through their baptism they had become a part of not just any fellowship... (and the Greek word used here is koinonia)...

...but that they were each called by God... "into the koinonia... into the fellowship of (God's) Son, Jesus Christ our Lord..."

...and then he practically begs the Corinthians not to let their differences divide them... something like my 2 year old granddaughter once did when she asked me for a bottle... "Bubba... PEEEEZZZZE!"

"PEEEEEZZZZE"... don't let your differences tear you apart! No one is better than the other... it's only by working together as the hands and feet and heart and mind of Jesus Christ can fellowship... can koinonia... truly happen... and the kingdom of God be revealed.

Though Paul is looking for harmony... and a singularity of focus... he's not saying that differences are a bad thing. After all... diversity is God created... God ordained... and God affirmed... Doesn't it say in Genesis that on the sixth day of creation "...God saw everything that (God) made, and indeed, it was very good."

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I discovered this week that another way to translate "koinonia" is: "a gift jointly contributed". Now it seems to me that adds a greater dimension and depth to the experience of fellowship... All variety of skills... gifts... talents... and perspectives working together towards a common goal... Doesn't that sound like the gears in my solar rainbow maker working together?

Our differences identify us... They can connect us to those of similar identity... as well as separate us from others. They can also enrich us and challenge us to grow. It seems to me that Paul was warning the Corinthians not to let their sameness seduce them into cozy clusters of isolated and insulated cliques... inflexible... resistant... or just plain stuck in a rut.

Whenever two or more uniquely diverse images and likeness of God come together to become the Body of Christ... disagreements are inevitable... And yet across the centuries I hear Paul encouraging us to honor our differences and let them lead us to a deeper understanding of the common ground on which we have been called to stand...

...let them lead us to a closer identification with the One Mind that Paul begs us to make our own.

Each one of us is here because we need what God has to offer... We're here because Jesus went fishing... and we got hooked... hooked by the promise of unconditional acceptance... the promise of radical forgiveness... the promise of being compassionately loved into wholeness.

The sameness that Paul is calling the Corinthian congregation to embody...  
...that Paul is calling all who have chosen to call themselves Christian to embody...  
...is more than a way of living by a prescribed set of beliefs and practices... it's a way of LOVING that shapes... directs... and gives meaning to our living... and honors our differences...  
...a way of loving that is touched by the redeeming and reconciling power of the Cross.

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My solar rainbow maker doesn't work unless its tiny little solar panel is perfectly aligned with the sun's rays... It seems to be fussy like that... That's the only explanation I can come up with for its intermittent performance...

But... no matter how much sunlight hits that solar panel... if just ONE gear in my solar rainbow maker stops moving... say for instance...

...if some unexpected trauma knocks it off balance...

...or if it just doesn't like change or feel like getting involved...

...if it refuses to work with a gear of a different color...

...or ignores all other gears that move in a different direction... then the prisms wouldn't budge and their ability to cast beautiful rainbows around the room would become severely limited.

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"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose."

Heavily leaning on the words of Theresa of Avila... to be called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord means that... "Christ has no body now but (OURS)!"... yours... mine... ours!

One of the disadvantages of being what my friend calls a "substitute preacher"... is that I don't often know very much about the congregation that I've been asked to pray with... and preach to. I can only offer you the thoughts that have been stirred in my heart.

Now... at the risk of carrying this metaphor a little too far... this morning I invite you to become more like my solar rainbow maker...

...when those different color... different size... different turning gears work in harmony together... the prisms turn... and the sunlight is reflected in a dazzling rainbow display...

This morning I invite all of you who gather here as the First Congregational Church of East Hartford...

...to jointly contribute your uniquely diverse gifts and perspectives...

...attentively reconcile whatever disagreements may develop among you...

...honor your God-created and God-blessed differences...

...and use them to work together in harmony

...to follow Jesus...

...to set your hands and feet and hearts and minds in his direction...

Strive to do that... my friends... and your ministries can't help but grow and glow... reflecting Christ's light... and revealing his love through a myriad shining points of compassion swirling and twirling throughout this congregation... and beyond.

PEEEEEZZZZZE!

Amen.