



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“A Living Body of Art”

1Corinthians 12:4-27, Luke 7:36-50

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I want to tell you about Sunday dinners in my household. Firstly, they don't always happen- the Sunday dinners that I'm talking about. Oh we always eat dinner on Sunday, but a Sunday dinner is a special thing and it happens as often as we can pull it off.

The plan usually starts by a text message going out to one of my daughters or one of our friends and the text simply says, “Sunday dinner?” Most of the time the reply comes quickly, “I'm in. What can I bring?” After this, a series of text messages go out to a group of people that we call family. This group includes family, Treena's folks, my kids, but it also includes our friend Blair, our friend Graham, and sometimes it includes others- it really depends on who is around and what is happening.

By about 6pm on Sunday evening, there is a lovely collection of people, friends, family, friends of family, people coming through town, gathered around our table for dinner- a real tossed salad or people, beloved flotsam and jetsam. And inevitably I look around the table at the human life that is represented there, the sheer magnitude of life story, the volume and beauty of humanity, and I find myself in wonder and awe that such a group as this could find its way to my table.

One among us regularly has said to me on more than one occasion, “this is my family of the heart.” And that is certainly the way it feels to me as well. I have family of my own and there is nothing that will ever stand in for that family. There are unique bonds that I have with my blood relatives that are irreplaceable. And at the same time, at Sunday dinner, I look around at the gathered group, often including my blood relatives but not only them, and I have to say, these people are family of the heart, chosen and beloved. And often I ask myself with gratitude, “How did this happen?”

From the time that Jesus first began to call his disciples together on the shores of the sea of Galilea, people wondered about that collection of people as well. You see there were strict social norms around who would associate with whom, and most of it was based on a clear definition family. You associate with your own family, your property belongs within your own family, your marriages carve strong boundaries around who belongs to whom, who belongs with whom. You are responsible for your family. And there were rules about who would take care of spouses if one spouse died. Who would take on responsibility for the children? Family lines were clearly drawn and understood. Unfortunately those lines just as often kept people apart, as drew them together. Jesus discovered, and his gospel thrived among those who were outside of the definition, beyond the pale.

One of the things that distinguished the community that surrounded Jesus was that people who were not family started to treat each other like they were family members. They started taking responsibility for each other in ways that crossed the family lines. They started to offer a commitment to each other's wellbeing that didn't fit the mold. They were re-drawing the lines and it was disturbing at times. Do you remember the time Jesus' family came to the place where he was teaching, worried that he was getting in over his head with both the controversy he was stirring up and the company he was keeping. And people said to him, your mother and your

brothers are outside. Do you remember his reply? "This is my mother. (pointing to people around him) These are my brothers- my sisters." I don't believe it was meant as any disrespect to his family of origin. I believe though that he was trying to draw new lines of connection, make new and radical circles of love that included people who had up until then been habitually excluded. And then on the cross, his mother and one of his disciples were there, and he looked at them and he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" You see, he was redrawing the lines, creating a new thing.

That new thing crashed the party at the Pharisee's house that night. It was all family, all the right people, the people who were supposed to be there, the customary people, appropriate. And then in comes one of Jesus' disciples, that questionable one, all passionate, emotional. And she doesn't just stand in the shadows and watch. That might have been tolerable. No, she comes right in, sits right down. And then she opens up a jar of ointment and anoints him. And she is weeping as she does it. Not only does the gift, the ointment, come pouring out, but so does the pain, the tears. But these tears are an offering as much as the anointing is. And somehow he is able to receive this odd, broken human being and somehow she know it. The keepers of the family lines are shocked and appalled. But he says, look what she did. I came here and you offered no blessing, yet she anointed me with precious oil. You offered no water for my weary feet. She bathed them with her tears. Don't give me those judgmental stares. This here is real faith. This here is beloved community. Behold, my family of the heart.

Well that rule defying, fence jumping collection of followers of Jesus kept it up after his death and by the time Paul was writing to the raggedy band, the motley crew that gathered in Corinth 2 decades later, he needed to offer them a totally new image of who they were. Family, as an image didn't really work anymore. So he said, You are the body of Christ, and each one members of that body. You draw life and breath from one and the same Spirit. You are expressions of one and the same love and grace. You are transformed by one and the same gospel of love and justice, but you are a mixed collections of members that are somehow the very body of Christ, one body, a new thing.

And when I look around at this collection of people here that we call Northwood, I see people who were born and grew up here in Surrey, and I see people who have come thousands of miles to live here. I see people who have held public office, and I see people who have pumped gas. I see an incredible diversity of life, of humanity and I marvel at the body of Christ, because just as last week I talked about God, the artist, and we, individually in our heart and soul, a work of art, today I look at us together and I behold God the artist, and this collection of people, the medium of God's handiwork- a work of art in progress together. I see sisters who are not sisters treating each other like sisters. I see elders behold children that are not their own blood relatives with love and affection I their eyes, watch them grow, show interest in their wellbeing. We are not the artist. The hand of the artist is unseen but the evidence is everywhere. The space between us is the medium God uses to create a work of art, a living body, artfully drawn together. The invitation is here, to allow your life to be a part of this body of art, to bring your precious oil, your precious life's energy, your precious character and offer it here, becoming a part of the body of Christ here.

Tonight we will have another Sunday dinner. This one will be different because we lost a member yesterday. But that's the thing about this particular body of art. It is constantly changing, and it is eternal. There are people at the table in spirit, and others at the table in body. Christ is at the table. George is at the table. It is a work of art that even jumps the fence of life and death to create a spiritual body. So look around with your eyes, and your memories, and your hearts, and behold who you are, behold who you are. Offer who you are. Become a body of art. Amen