

Uncomfortable Church: Uncomfortable People
1 Corinthians 12:12-14; 21-27
St. Mark's & St. James UCC ~ September 20, 2020
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We began exploring Uncomfortable Faith together on August 2nd. We did so with the intention of knowing God more deeply and closely, by discovering or acknowledging that which can make us feel uncomfortable in our faith.

Up to this point we've looked at and talked about Uncomfortable Faith with a vertical perspective or viewpoint.

Both vertical and horizontal perspective, view, discovery... speak of & to God. Whereas the vertical understanding speaks directly to God: from us to Him;

the horizontal understanding speaks to the impact God has on his people: and our worship; our diversity & unity, our commitment, comfort and authority. Those are impacted by God's divine influence on each of us as we come together as the body of Christ.

When I talk about God's divine influence, I'm referring to those moments, movements, mission and ministry like the day you accepted Christ as Lord and Savior or decided to follow Christ's call into ministry. Or when we, as a church, give ourselves entirely into God's hands on an important decision. A commitment to youth ministry outside our church walls; or perhaps offering an alternative worship style; or seeing firsthand the impact our mission work has on those whom we are helping.

The first 7-weeks of this series the vertical look at our faith began with embracing the discomfort! Accepting we would not always feel comfortable and at ease and

rather than to run from that or to fix it according to our own desires or comfort levels – we decided to embrace it!

- There was the meaning of the Cross – what it meant for us, and the church, and all of humanity. And the challenge of living a holy, righteous life.
- There are the uncomfortable truths – while truth will set us free ~ it is often less comfortable or comforting than we expect.
- Certainly, the uncomfortableness of love, the Holy Spirit and mission in and for God are a part of our vertical connection.

Ohhh how those things can make us feel uncomfortable even as they draw us closer to God!

But over these next week's we're looking at our relationship with God from a horizontal perspective. Today I'm beginning with people. Is there anything as simultaneously comforting and discomfoting as people?

Mark Twain once said:

A little more kindness, a little less speed,
a little more giving, a little less greed.

A little more smile, a little less frown,
a little less kicking, a man while he's down.

A little more "We", a little less "I",
a little more laugh, a little less cry.

A little more flowers, on the pathway of life,
and fewer on graves, at the end of the strife.

In these simple words Twain captures both the problems of people and their capacity for loving, caring, holy living. How we feel about *what* is being said, depends on *where* we are in what is being said.

Are we the ones who have slowed down and become less greedy? Do we smile more and say “I” less; laugh more and cry less? Do we live our lives more fully and with more flowers?

Or are we the ones being told you must slow down and be more giving. You need to smile more and stop frowning so much and lift your fellow man up! You need to sow more flowers while you are here, alive and well.

Where do you find yourselves?

Here in church we find not only both sides of Twain’s writing, but also with many other highs and lows, graces and unkindness and lots of idiosyncrasies that make us who we are and sometimes irritates others to death.

The church is filled with many different types of people and less I think “I would never be on one of those quirk some, irritating personality-type lists... rest assured I know that I’m on your list.

The point is we should not expect our church, or any church, to be free of people who are irksome or quirky or even annoying.

Reality is that all of God’s people have different backgrounds, personalities, and opinions. Sometimes these clash. It can be messy. It’s hugely challenging to commit to a family this size. But that’s not an optional choice for us.

As sons and daughters of God, we can't pick and choose, nor can we hit reverse and go back to "*others just like me*" friends' groups. We need to lean into the family as a whole, because this whole body of Christ – sisters and brothers in Christ – sons and daughters of God – members of this church... we all make up the church.

People problems have been part of the church since the very beginning. Peter and John had a rivalry between them. Paul and Barnabas went separate ways in their ministry when they could not agree on John Mark. James and John had all the other disciples mad at them at one point when they were still with Jesus because they wanted to sit in places of honor at the right and left of Jesus in heaven.

Our Bible doesn't hide these conflicts because it shows the tension of a diverse group of people coming together in Christ's name. And sometimes that's messy and combustible. But, its also at the heart of the Gospel. And if we're being authentic here – and we should always be –

Which is easier? To stay home on Sunday morning? Kicking back in your jammies or going out to eat for breakfast and then home for the game?

Or go to church and spend an hour ~ hour and a half praying, worshipping, fellowshiping, singing... with people you might never have hung out with otherwise?

Church removes – or should remove – the barriers of extrovert or introvert, millennial or octogenarian, Republican or Democrat, gay or straight. While those barriers are removed we have a safe place in which we can relate to others. It's a place where we can ask questions of God, Christ, our Faith...

Church is not a place filled with perfect people: it is a sanctuary for the imperfect, the sinner, the neglected, the overwhelmed, the frightened: the happy, the newly married, the couple that has been married for 67 years. It's a place to gather for those who want to know more about God; who want to learn about ministry and mission; who want their children to grow up having a solid foundation and understanding of their own faith. It's a place where you can feel the call of Christ into ministry ~ and you can share your gifts and talents in following that call. It's a place where we can ask questions and have doubts and uncertainties ~ all this and so much more.

This is the church Christ imagined.

A body,

One of many parts – whose many parts form a whole.

We we're all baptized by the Spirit ~ the same Spirit
to form a whole body.

Each part is different – Jew, Gentile, slave or free.

It is a body made up of many parts.

An eye, a head, a hand or foot. There are stronger and weaker parts; more honorable and less honorable parts; as well as some we consider unpresentable. Yet, God has put the body together.

Giving greater honor to the parts that lack special treatment, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;

if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

We cannot say I can do without you. I don't need you. You are weak and therefore not an important part of this body. You are not special enough, so you get no special treatment. Be on your way.

The body of Christ is just the opposite.

I cannot do without you. I need you. You are weak and therefore we will lift and support you so you will know you are special. Stay. Be a part of the body of Christ and help us to be a *whole* body of Christ. For if you leave – we will be missing an import part of our body.

There is a desire to belong to something more meaningful with higher purpose.

Psychologists sometimes call this *Sehnsucht* a German word meaning *longing, desire, yearning* or *craving*. *Sehnsucht* is a word describing how we long to fill all the empty parts of our lives; or finish the unfinished parts; or find perfection in the imperfection of our lives.

Paul expresses the perfect fulfillment of this desire in 1 Corinthians when he writes: “*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*”