

“The Family Reunion: Breathing the Same Air”

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I Corinthians 12:12-27

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¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ***The Word of the Lord.... Thanks!***

Have you been to a family reunion lately? Thanks to the generosity of my mother, Mary Wade Freeman, our family recently enjoyed a family reunion alongside Lake Delavan in Wisconsin where we enjoyed a wonderful week.

From California, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois and Ohio four generations of Wade's converged at Lake Delavan and, for the first time in many years, we breathed the same air. Our grandchildren, *Annabelle* and *Elliott*, are no longer my mother's only great grandchildren. *Brayden* was born last December in California and *Kristinia* was born on New Year's Day in Iowa. You would have thought my mother was a rock star with all the cameras clicking as she and her four great grandchildren posed for pictures.

Twenty nine individuals, ranging in age from 7 months to 88 years, coming together from five different states and who knows how many different states of mind, belief, opinion, needs, wants and expectations can make a family reunion a dicey experiment. Families are complex! Like most families, our family covers a wide swath of politics, religion, life-style and temperament. With the Saturday kick-off supper allotted to the Bob Wade family, we decided to go all out with grilled steak, chicken, and brats followed by, not one, but two hand cranked freezers of the world's best homemade ice cream.

While food is an indispensable necessity for launching a family reunion, I also wanted to present something that would bring us together and help us ponder the importance of family. Since I knew my family didn't want to hear me preach, I thought of *Ryan Grieco*. Ryan, a graduate of Evansville University with a degree in writing, had written a poem which he read at a Grieco family reunion several years ago. He titled his poem The Family Reunion! Ryan graciously gave me permission to present his poem to my family. So, between the steak and ice cream, I invited my family to consider the gift of family as my nephew, *Travis Martin*, read Ryan's poem. They loved the poem and it set the stage for a glorious family reunion.

So, this week I, again, contacted Ryan about presenting his poem that we might ponder being a family of faith here at Fairmont.

The Family Reunion by *Ryan Jeffrey Grieco*

It is the hearty evergreen that has been

So carelessly stashed into the back seat of a car and out the trunk.

All its branches then hang together and debunk

The misconception that branches must disperse farther and farther apart.

*A house of mirrors, all members
 Can find pieces of themselves within their “distortions.”
 No one gets along out of any obligations.
 But rather, because of their genuinely shared connections.*

*It is a time of highly-concentrated community
 For those who bear and uphold the shield,
 A device every member must help wield.
 And the reunion operates as a gentle reminder of its power.*

*The family an upside down house of cards.
 The reunion’s success relies on the friction and balance between its
 members.
 Its unique foundation has been cemented in by the elders.
 And even as the house grows, every piece proves elemental to its integrity.*

*For a family of considerable size,
 It acts as a national climate map; it’s been sunny here, hailing there.
 But for the first time in a long time, the air
 That is inhaled is the same for all. And only one forecast matters.*

*It is the fastest form of communication
 That will never be beaten by the likes of the Internet.
 Time and word constraints lose their threat,
 Since no white textbox guards against shared living quarters.*

*A family reunion is a reminder of the
 Essence of family; for as long as a person has a family,
 That person has a home on a branch on a tree
 And suitable roots from which to thrive and live comfortably.*

Thank you, Ryan, for a deeply moving and meaningful poem. When I read Ryan’s poem, I couldn’t help but think of Paul’s *Body of Christ* narrative in I Corinthians 12.

This morning we have baptized *Avery Mya* and *Anna Josephine Glueckert* and as our scripture reminds us, they have been **“baptized into one body.”** Those who have been baptized form the One Body of Jesus Christ...
Christ’s family on earth. **“Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.”** This is the essence of Christ’s Church....his family on earth. Our church family is made up of many members of all ages with differing histories, gifts, opinions, beliefs, interests and expectations. Yes, we are wonderfully and uniquely created but let us never forget that we are one body and while we celebrate our individuality we belong to one family!

Ryan described the family reunion as a house of mirrors. During our family reunion in Wisconsin, a group of us drove into Chicago and took in a Cubs game (sorry they lost), and then a smaller group of us chose to explore the Navy Pier. In our exploration we discovered a large mirror like the kind in a *“house of mirrors.”* The mirror triggered our playful side as we made faces, turned and twisted. We couldn’t help but laugh at the distortions we saw in ourselves. However, even within the distortions, we could *“find pieces of ourselves”* and we *“genuinely shared connections”* as family members.

That’s what God desires for our church family. We recognize that no one is perfect....each and every one of us have distortions but we genuinely share our connection of being baptized into Christ Jesus. With that connection, which can never be broken, let us relax, take ourselves less seriously and be playful and loving because we know we are accepted as we are in Jesus Christ....even with our distortions.

Have you ever had conflict in your family? Has there ever been friction in your family? If your answer is “no” then you live in a very rare family. Sometimes conflict becomes so acute a family member will say, *“I don’t need you!”* Paul understood this when he wrote, **“As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you. On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.”** When there are many members much understanding, patience and grace is needed for the body to remain one.

I loved Ryan's description of the family as an "*upside down house of cards*" where "*the reunion's success relies on the friction and balance between its members.*" Friction happens! It's not all bad! Iron sharpens iron. There are times when we need straight talk....there are times when we will disagree with one another. Ideally in those times we agree to disagree agreeably. But we don't always disagree agreeably....we sometimes get on one another's nerves and, in fact, we can be quite unpleasant to one another. After all, we are family! Those are the times we confess and seek reconciliation based on the understanding that "*...as the house grows, every piece proves elemental to its integrity.*" We need each other....even those who disagree with us and those who rub us the wrong way. As Paul wrote, "***Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.***"

Ryan wrote, "*A family reunion is a reminder of the Essence of family; for as long as a person has a family, That person has a home on a branch on a tree And suitable roots from which to thrive and live comfortably.*" You are important....you are integral to our church family....you have a home on a branch on a tree that God is growing. Paul describes the care God desires for Fairmont's family, "***If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.***" It has been said, "*Cared for people, care for people.*" I thank you for being a caring church family! I thank you for being a welcoming and hospitable church! I thank you for sharing one another's sorrow and sharing one another's celebrations of life.

As I ponder the theme of family reunion and the church family it occurred to me that we have a family reunion every week! This is the only time in history when this exact group of family members will be together. Next week some of you will be on vacation, some of you will have to work, some of you might be fighting a flu bug, some may be playing golf and you will not be here. As I pondered Ryan's words about the family reunion being the "*first time in a long time, the air that is inhaled is the same for all*" I realized that is true every Sunday for us. Each Sunday is a family reunion! Each Sunday's family reunion is a singular event because it will be the only time that particular group of family members will *ever* be together. This gives me a sense of *holy expectancy!*

The sense of *holy expectancy* was reinforced in Eugene Petersen's book The Pastor: A Memoir which I am currently reading. Petersen, as I hope you know, is a Presbyterian pastor/scholar who translated the Bible into The Message. Petersen is very honest as he reflects upon his fifty year journey as pastor and professor. In one chapter, he describes how he almost got caught-up in the trap of "*defining my congregation—as problems.....if problems were the problem, problems could be fixed.*" (page 135) Petersen goes into great detail about how he escaped this seductive trap of defining his congregation as problems and how he gradually began to view his congregation with new eyes. I love where his journey led him!

This is what he writes concerning his new vision, "*The people who made up my congregation had plenty of problems and more than enough inadequacies, but congregation is not defined by its collective problems. Congregation is a company of people who are defined by their creation in the image of God, living souls, whether they know it or not. They are not problems to be fixed, but mysteries to be honored and revered. Who else in the community other than the pastor has the assigned task of greeting men and women and welcoming them into a congregation in which they are known not by what is wrong with them, but by who they are, just as they are?....My work is not to fix people. It is to lead people in the worship of God and to lead them in living a holy life." (page 136 & 137)*

I resonate with Petersen and that is why I look forward to our weekly family reunions where we will have a singular opportunity to breathe the breath of the Spirit who calls us into living and life-giving relationship with our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer! Who knows what God has in store for you and how you might be a blessing to God and those around you in our weekly family reunion? There is a holy mystery to God's people joining in worship that provides God opportunity to do God's good work within us and offers us the joy of worship.

I thank God for our weekly family reunions where we have the opportunity to breathe the life giving oxygen of God's Spirit! I look forward to being with at the next family reunion! (*Prayer*)

Amen