

March 26, 2017

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Holy Vessels: “Different Pictures“

2 Corinthians 5:17

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

In my last church, (a UCC church in Doylestown), I developed an end of the workday practice. I would go up to the sanctuary on the second floor (which seated 600 people) and sit in a certain pew at a particular time in the afternoon (it changed with the seasons), so I could sit in the glow of the light from their “Good Shepherd” stained glass window.

One of the things that struck me about that practice, is how it felt like it was just me and Jesus. That was one of the challenges of that church, I felt out there, all by myself, all alone, except for you know – Jesus. The problem with that is that we had just me, and it’s not that, that was bad, but it was not enough. It wasn’t how God designed the church. We should have all been there together, basking in the glow of Jesus’ light. We need diversity. It is not just nice, it is essential, it is not just something extra, it is necessary.

The next thing I learned while basking in Jesus light day after day for over a year, is that I was much more colorful than I imagined. The way the Good Shepherd window was laid out in relation to where I sat, allowed many colors within the window to cast their light on me.

I don’t know about you, but Jesus and Christian community have allowed me to see myself in multiple ways. Christian community done right can allow all of us to see the whole picture of ourselves that we can claim. It can help us look beyond simplistic or short

sighted views of ourselves and stereotypes of others, which rob us of the image in God in them – and their worth as holy vessels.

In SoulCollage, one makes a decks comprised of four suits (just like a deck of cards). One suit, is called “the Committee” and it is made up of the various parts of yourself. This week, in light of this sermon, I went through “the Committee” cards in my deck, and began to think about how much Christian community has helped me discover and sustain these parts of me.

The Church helped me discover:

**(The Leader Card: Sled dogs)**

“The Leader” me – by putting me on a church board as a teenager, and having me lead the Jr. High Sunday School when I was in senior high, and by giving me the college award for the student who showed the most energy, enterprise, and innovation during their four years.

**(The Thinking Outside the Box Card: Man leaning head against box)**

How to be an outside the box thinker and that, that was not only necessary, but essential for not just thriving, but at times surviving!

**(The Mystic Card: Canyons, Cross Chapel and Monk)**

That faith could be mystical and that the unknown could be marvelous and not frustrating or food for doubt.

**(The Survivor Card: Dinosaurs and buffalo)**

Christian community help me face the abuse that was part of my story and to see myself as someone who could not only get through the memories of it, but also use it to be a more compassionate human being and be of greater help to others.

**(The Artist Card: Horse Painting, Nutcrackers Going to Word, Camera)** St. James community more than any other place I have been, has helped me to get more and more comfortable to own and disclose the artistic part of me. You have allowed me to try various mediums and in doing so, it has helped me open up in the area of art and in other areas that I never imagined would ever come to be. And in turn, I have tried to share more and more of my art with you for the purpose of meaningful and inspiring worship and to help the artistic ones among us, become more comfortable with that part of themselves, and to help some of you discover you really do have this in you.

**(The Tomboy Card: Barbie, Truck, Bike, Gun, Bow and Arrow)**

The Church helped me come to know myself as precious, loved and valued. Even if I hated as a girl playing with Barbie and would rather play trucks in the direct and learn to shoot a bow and arrow, and then as a woman to be somewhat more androgenous than some. Christian community helped me to “be” me, and know I should be who I am, because everyone else is taken.

**(Fibromyalgia Card “The Diagnosis”: Rubics cube, shark, bear...)**

Christian community has sustained me when I have not felt well with my chronic disease. In community, I have found courage to face whatever it brings, till a cure comes, till then, the church has taught me how to handle the time I am in now.

**(The Gay Card: Woman in rainbow colored dress, and whirling dervish dancers)**

Christian community has taught me to not hide that I am gay, but to celebrate it. To realize what being gay has brought me, and how it causes me to see my world in such a way that it is an asset and not a detriment.

**(The Bridge Builder: Amish, John Calvin, Bridges and Walls)**

The Church has taught me first-hand the freedom that comes with forgiveness and how it is much more life-giving and effective to build bridges, rather than walls.

**(The Coming Out Card: Woman unwrapping, two women in sleeping bags)** Christian community has helped me see how God made me, and that love no matter what its wrapper is still love. It has helped me come out regarding my partnership and now legal marriage with Lynne and how together we make something stronger than each of us could have been and done separately.

The Church has helped me come out in all kinds of ways! May it do the same for you too – no matter what your orientation, traumas, abilities, skills, race, ethnicity, gender identity, experience or temperament. For the gift of community can create new and different pictures of ourselves. For anyone who is in Christ, is a new creation, the old things have gone away (the inhibitions, the fear, the shame, the discomfort, the hiddenness, the concealing, the faking, the conformity), new things have arrived.! No, they are not new really, they just become real, because we now in community feel safe and secure enough to manifest them.

Many people say, “I don’t need religion.” In other words, I can do the “Godthing” by myself. Yes and no, according to our faith tradition. No, because we become new in Christ not just through a prayer we say, or a step of faith we take, or a life changing decision or life impacting encounter with God. No, because we become new in Christ when we see ourselves in new and different ways through the positive things in us that are too close, so that

we ourselves are blind to see them. Yet, they are distant enough for others to reflect them back to us.

All that remains is really a two-fold question, which needs to be answered by you as a person and by us as a church. Will we continue and further create the kind of community that allows people to be and discover all of who they are – in all their glory? And, are you as an individual willing to take the chance with us, that what we say we see in you is really there – in all it's glory? May it be so! Amen.