

May 17, 2020 Sermon – One World

We all have various memories of childhood, from vacations to family dinners to school events and more. For many of us, we're fortunate enough that those memories include a trip to either Disney World or Disney Land. Although ever changing and ever developing, there are certain attractions that remain, steadfast through generation after generation of visitors. Keeping that in mind, I need to start today with an apology. Why? Because the attraction I have in mind is probably going to get a song stuck in at least a few of your heads. I'm talking about the ever-popular ride It's a Small World; you can hear it already, can't you? This easy-going boat ride takes us through room after room of cultural images, somewhat overwhelming us with a wide array of bright colors, light, and sound, reminding us that although our large world is filled with different customs and different people, our connection as human beings can turn that large world into a smaller one.

When asked to write a sermon, I normally start by referencing my two good friends Meriam and Webster. Upon looking up this week's word, reintegrate, I read "to integrate again into an entity," to which my simpleton mind thought, "Huh?" Upon further inspection; my hopes perked back up as I read "to restore to unity." What am I going to do with this? I thought.

When we think of the word unity, our minds might go to the word "unified." This is quite the concept in a time when we're supposed to be social distancing, or as Aaron's mom has started calling it "physical distancing." If you think about it, that makes sense. Just because we're supposed to distance ourselves by six feet doesn't mean we can't be spiritually and emotionally close. Just like the lyrics to It's a Small World, we live in "a world of hope and a world of fears." However, both now and throughout life, this tune reminds us the "there's so much that we share." Truly, we can be united as one despite being physically apart.

There are various ways to think of ourselves as being unified. The most basic involves face-to-face, often in-person, interactions. Recently, we've started having a Zoom coffee hour each Sunday. While this is something small, the concept of being able to see the people who whom we're conversing is so special. It lends a sense of

togetherness despite the distance we have physically. Unity can also come from having similar interests. Throughout our lives, we're involved in groups that unify us based on similar interests, including scouts, 4-H, fraternities and sororities, environmental groups, food likes, music and theatre groups, places to worship, and countless more. Although groups such as these initially unify us physically when we join them, they can lead to relationships that connect us to others no matter where we find ourselves throughout life. Even years after we physically separate from our initial groups, we know that the memories and friendships we've made hold us together. Our togetherness reintegrates us.

There are other ways to connect, however. Though definitely what we think of as the norm, narrowing our view of reintegration to just physical and face-to-face interactions narrows our unity to those who are living during the same time and place we are. If you think about it, we can be unified in spirit with those who've come before us as well.

Throughout the weeks following Easter, we have been working our way through the concepts of being drawn in through the creative process. We started by discussing the power of dreams, then moved into how the concept of hovering can help us focus. Week three showed us the benefits of risks, and last week, Maggie discussed the power of listening carefully. In the book *Drawn In*, the book we've followed for these themes, Troy Bronsink refers to the book of Genesis through now as an integrated square dance. In other words, the stories in the first book of the Bible are not just stories we read in church; they're a part of us. Just as we are reminded in today's passage from Deuteronomy, who we are today is built on we our ancestors were. We think of the characters in those stories as characters, but really, they are part of who we are, just like those friends we've met through our clubs and groups throughout life. It's a two-way story.

As we discuss this concept of the creative process, we need to remember that said creative process has two sides. One of the quotes in our book *Drawn In* that resonated with me says, "Music becomes something once it vibrates the eardrum and soul of the listener." As a society, we often complement our creative artists: the musicians, the actors, the authors, the artists, the chefs, anyone really. However,

without someone with a desire to appreciate that art, the beauty is lost. Imagine if Leonardo da Vinci had never shown the Mona Lisa to anyone; generations of people wouldn't be able to debate what she was smiling at! This connection from composition to appreciation further connects generations of people.

I'd like to extend this concept of reintegration through generations to something near and dear to my life. For those of us involved in theatre, every show we do introduces us to people with whom we probably never would have crossed paths if not for the arts. We work together to build a show, and in doing so, we build incredible relationships. It's always amazing to me that after months of building a show, the show strike, the term for cleanup, usually only takes a few hours. However, I've noticed something interesting over the years. Often, when a set piece, costume, or prop from a previous show surfaces, I share stories of when it was made and who made it. There have been many post-rehearsal chat sessions that found drama club members asking question upon question about stories of previous drama club generations. I've heard many of those stories repeated the next day to other club members, thus further connecting yesterday to today. Through this connection, the many become one.

One memory in particular that sticks out was just a few years ago, when drama club put on a production of *The Music Man*. In addition to this being a fun show for us, for the Gaylord community, this show holds special significance in that it was the very first show ever performed by Gaylord Community Productions, twenty-two years prior. After one of our performances, I watched with glee as Josh Moody, the young man who performed the mayor in our show met Dave Smethurst, the man who portrayed the mayor in GCP's first ever show. The glimmer in both of their sets of eyes could have lit a room. Talk about the arts unifying two into one.

So what's the point? Why reintegrate ourselves as one society? Why not praise our differences? We hear a lot in the media about being yourself, about standing up for you and stepping on those who get in your way. To start, we need to remind ourselves that reintegration and unity don't mean giving up who we individually. It's our differences that bring us together, and although we're all different, we're still connected. After all, we're reminded in our passage from Corinthians today that just because the foot says it's not part of the body doesn't mean it's not. Globally, we're all part of the

body. In the creative arts, we must depend on each other. It's impossible to have success without the help of others, in both the creative process and in life. Even the hermit who wants to live alone needs to start by finding someone who will sell or rent him/her a place to live.

Today, we hear the words of Bob Marley in the song *One Love*, a song that beautifully discusses the oneness of the world that includes both saint and sinner. Marley's words encourage us to come together despite our differences in order to "fight this Holy Armageddon." When Marley wrote these lyrics, Jamaica was in the middle of a major political crisis amid the prime ministerial elections of 1976, a time that pitted family member against family member. The call to get together didn't necessarily mean physically; it meant the call to work together to solve a problem, to reintegrate his homeland. Sound similar to anything going on right now?

We've discussed connecting the past to the present, but where does the future come in play? Can our past really help us move forward? For that answer, I'd like to briefly discuss one of our family hobbies. We Hotelling's are a LEGO family. Every year for many years, both Santa and the Easter Bunny have brought Aaron and Ian a LEGO set to build. Every year, when they finish building, we post pictures of the finished product, and it's happened for so many years that friends and family wait to see the finished art. We now have so many that one of Aaron's quarantine projects became building LEGO themed shelves on which to store them. Therefore, we were excited this year when a new TV show started called LEGO Masters, a tournament-style game where each week, teams were given a different challenge to build a sculpture.

One week, the challenge was to build a sculpture that would actually be destroyed, and contestants were judged not only on the creative designs they built but also on how elaborately those sculptures looked during destruction. At the end of the episode, one piece after another was either dropped, blown up, or whacked. In the show interviews, most of the teams had similar things to say, that they were impressed with how extravagant the destruction was but how it was still difficult to say goodbye. What I noticed as we were watching, though, was this. Each time a work of art was destroyed, the individual pieces were put back into the bins to later be made into a future piece. The past would become part of the future. Like those broken LEGOs,

seemingly broken parts of our past can help build our future selves, and in the building process, we find ourselves learning lessons we never would have thought of before, lessons about who we are and who we want to be.

So what does that mean for us right now? Throughout the past couple of months, there have been many images shared on social media, both positive and negative. Many of them start with the same phrase, “when all of this is over,” often followed by some sort of amusing image or video of the hoped-for goal. These include everything from visits to hair salons to social gatherings, but the more I see this phrase, the more I start to wonder something. What does “when all of this is over” really mean? The implication is that this period of time will end and we’ll return to the way things were before. In doing this, however, we ignore what we’ve learned. We ignore those who have worked so hard to protect so many. We ignore the chance to connect who we were as a world before with who we are to become. We ignore the broken LEGOs and miss the lesson.

In the field of teaching, we encourage our students to continue learning throughout their lives. We encourage them to use what they’ve learned in the past, combined with what they’ll continue to learn to better the world around them. Just as we were instructed today in our scripture passage not to forget our past, we need remember what we’ve learned when moving forward. Let’s remember that we are connected to those who came before us and that we’re connected to those who will follow us. Let’s remember that like the artist needs an audience, an audience needs to artist, that we need others and they need us. Let’s remember that what might seem broken at times can become the next masterpiece. Rather than “when all of this is over,” I encourage us to use a different phrase, “when this lesson merges into the next.” Let’s use the bonds we have created and the lessons we’ve learned to create a much smaller world, one world, united in love.