Ever since I was a kid, I’ve enjoyed putting together jig-saw puzzles. I find it to be a relaxing activity, but sometimes it can be a bit of a challenge, especially at the beginning. It helps one exercises his/her imagination and creativity, as well as one’s patience and perseverance. More importantly it helps someone to think more logically “outside the box” and to see things from a slightly different perspective. What really gives me joy is that I enjoy seeing how all the pieces fitting together and form this one collage at the end. Each individual piece of the puzzle plays an important part and contributes to the overall picture.

As you see here, this was one of the more challenging puzzles that I completed a few years ago. It was the famous annual Balloon Festival in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It took me a couple of days in order to finish, but at the end, I was able to finish with a great sense of accomplishment and gratification. You can see just how challenging this puzzle is with all the different colors that look very similar to one another.

Sometimes our lives can also resemble a giant jig-saw puzzle with various aspects and people in our lives coming together and falling into their proper place and in the proper time. Our individual life also becomes part of a much larger picture of an organization or our society, however small or insignificant we think it might be. **Who are WE in light of God’s spectrum of eternal purpose and time? Who are WE amongst all the saints who came before us and also those who will come after us?**

It seems rather fitting that the passage that we read earlier from II Corinthian comes up on the week when this congregation commemorates its 119th Anniversary of ministry in this particular place, and in this particular time.

119years is a very long time…even our oldest current member – Sylvia Payne, who will soon be 99 wasn’t even born yet when this ministry began back in 1900. If we listen carefully, we can almost hear the voices echoing off these walls, these stained-glass windows, the pews, or the clock. We read about the legacy and the faces off the plaques and photos in and around the Corey Room. Often times we take these things for granted.  **History does define and shape us into who we are and what we may become…for better or for worse!**

If you recall a couple of weeks ago, on Pentecost Sunday, we looked into the passage of the prophet Ezekiel who saw a vision about the piles of dry bones laying in the valley. When the Spirit of God passed over those dry bones, it breathed life into them, all the ligament, tissues, nerves, and muscles began to reshape and work together once again. Now obviously this vision was a metaphor of not only our lives, but also for the church – the body of Christ. Each of us must uphold our individual callings in order to fulfill our common purpose, for the benefit of the body. In spite of our differences, we must work together through various odds and ends, shapes and sizes, young and old, talents and gifts, as well as varying degree of temperaments and personalities.

This is part of the “Koinonia” community that I spoke about last Sunday of what it means to be a church. As a matter of fact, the Greek word for Church “*ekklesia*” literally means an assembly of people. When we assemble the people together, we put together different pieces together into one giant jig-saw puzzle, in order to form one larger picture and illuminate one over-arching theme to the audience.

As the Apostle Paul, **“*For 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. 13 For 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. 14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.”[[1]](#footnote-1)***

All of us are in the business of Tent-making. Not literally of course of what we see here on earth…but something much greater, longer-lasting, and intangible. **We are building not just a temporary earthly shelter, but a heavenly home for the Kingdom of God!** We shall fix our eyes and our hearts upon what we may not see instead of what we can see. **What are we being called to be a part of in the overall God’s mission here on earth today?**

This week, our national church – the *Presbyterian Church (USA)* will once again hold its biennial gathering, the *General Assembly* in St. Louis, Missouri. More than 2,300 fellow Presbyterians, representing 16 Synods, 173 Presbyteries, 9,636 congregations, and more than 1.5 million members will convene from north, south, east and west. They convene not only geographically but also along the varying theological spectrum as well, with one purpose in mind…that is to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the earthly mission that we are being called to be a part of and entrusted with. Together we will pray and discern where the Spirit might lead us. **What does it mean for us to be “church” in 2018 and beyond…not church the institution, in the traditional sense, but as a gathered community of witness of our faith, whenever and wherever we might find ourselves in?**

This would be my 4th time that I will be taking part of the *General Assembly*, either as a committee member or as an observer. To be honest, each assembly gave me conflicting emotion of excitement and anticipation but also a great deal of skepticism, anxiety and concerns when I see how the body of Christ is still much divided along various social and theological spectrum even within the same church.

This is exactly what we are being called to be a part of, as we live out the spirit of unity in the midst of our diversities, reconciling our differences with one another. We may debate tirelessly long into the night over essential (or non-essential) matters, but at the end what matters most is that Christ’s name be honored and glorified and that individual lives may be transformed and stories re-written under the embodiment God’s grace, humility and love.

One of the most beautiful part of the Assembly, in my opinion, is the Opening Worship on Saturday before we conduct any business when all of us come together through, in the breaking of the same bread and drinking of the same cup as a powerful witness that we are one body and we are one church.

The church of Jesus Christ and its overall mission are still actively alive today. We may have our own dysfunctions or we may not be as healthy as it used to be in terms of our vital signs, but the Holy Spirit continues to breathe new life into the body and gives us new hope for our future day-by-day.

As we read in our passage earlier, the Apostle Paul reminded the early church in Corinth and us today that even though ***“our outer nature may be wasting away, but our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [Therefore, let us] look not at what CAN be seen but at what CANNOT be seen; for what CAN be seen is temporary, but what CANNOT be seen is eternal.”*** [[2]](#footnote-2)

Later on, as our responding hymn, we will be singing the same hymn as the opening hymn of the upcoming *General Assembly -* “*The Church’s One Foundation*”*.* The lyrics of this popular English hymn were written around 1850 by a young English priest of the Church of England named Samuel John Stone. Stone decided to write this hymn in order to re-affirm the foundational tenets of the Christian faith, based on the *Apostles’ Creed*. He was motivated and troubled by the schism that was happening within the church in South Africa at the time. He chose the words from the *Apostle’s Creed* because it unified the divided church around 390 AD. Stone was hoping that this hymn “The Church’s One Foundation” would unify the church again.

How true that is also among our churches today…that we must get back into our basics, by setting aside our earthly doctrinal differences and focus our hearts upon what’s more important and what’s more life-giving for the body of Christ. **Everybody can be a critic of someone or something of their dissatisfactions, but who is willing to step up in taking action and be a part of the resolution and transformation?**

As the Apostle Paul reminded us in the passage that we read earlier, the Holy Spirit will sustain us, protect us, and deliver us from various trials and challenges “day-by-day”. The term “day-by-day” implies that this is an incremental process. It does not come overnight, so don’t expect an instant gratification or success. God’s timing is not our timing. Our will is not God’s will. We must lay our faith foundation and trust upon Christ and not upon ourselves. As a familiar Sunday School children song claims, *“Don’t build your house on sandy land, don’t build too near the shore, but build upon the solid rock of Christ!”*

As we read earlier from our Responsive Reading in Psalm 138, the Psalmist declared **“*God’s love and faithfulness remain steadfast and we shall exalt God’s name offer God our thanksgiving and praise with our whole hearts. The LORD shall fulfill his purpose for us. His steadfast love endures forever!”***

We live in a dynamic and fluid time in society when things are moving at a much faster pace than we can keep up. Our society and ministry are not what they used to be. With the Holy Spirit leading the way, we can be assured and be ready for the next challenge, whatever that might be?

Let us pause and pray that we will be opened to the leading of the Holy Spirit, not only for this congregation, but for our neighborhood, our city, our Presbytery, our Synod and for the Presbyterian Church (USA) that will convene later on this week. We pray that we may never forget the ministry vows that many of us have taken as elders, deacons, and leaders God’s church, as we **seek to pray for and serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love**.[[3]](#footnote-3)

May we lay aside and reconcile our human differences, including the sins of our past that might hinder us from fostering genuine relationship with one others. May we dismantle our sense of arrogance, superiority, entitlement, privileges over others that have often divided the body of Christ among us over the years once and for all.

This is part of God’s vision of koinonia, as well as God’s challenge for us today. No longer shall we build temporary shelters here on earth, but we shall build this eternal and heavenly home for the Kingdom of God. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *1 Corinthians 12:12-14* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *2 Corinthians 4:16, 18* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. W-4.4003h *Book of Order* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)