

Mouths
FPC Lowville 10/15/17

For those of you who are familiar with my career as an almost pastor know, I seem to like naming my sermons after body parts. First there was “Eyes”, then there was “Hands!” And now “Mouths!” Metaphors of the body for the enhancement of the spirit!

After some consideration I have come to believe that “Mouths” are the best part of the body! They really do provide us the best of times!

Consider this: the mouth houses the lips which gave and received our first kiss! And the kiss of a child or grandchild. And the mouth houses the tongue which provides us our sense of taste! And the mouth is the source of our speech.

And our ability to talk allowed us to say: I Love you for the first time; and allowed our children to say Mama and Dada: or for our grandchildren to say “Hi Pop!!”

Our mouths are the creators of an Oral Tradition in our faith that is over 2000 years old. From a time before Jesus and certainly during his time on earth **mouths were the primary form of teaching and inspiring others about our faith.**

Go back with me to this time 2000 years ago and consider these thoughts:

The Illiteracy rate was higher than 90%. Why? Because for the most part there was no reason to read. Why? Because there was nothing TO read. Common people could go their whole lives with no reason to read! Scholars aren't sure if Jesus could read; but they all agree he learned about his faith primarily from stories.

The 12 disciples most likely couldn't read! Jesus, as far as we know, never wrote down a sermon or produced a Gospel. Its no wonder that Matthew relates to us in todays scripture that Jesus told stories. Its what his audience could relate too. He couldn't pass out pamphlets

The first gospel composed was Mark: and it was written between 25 and 50 years AFTER Jesus death. So where did Mark get his information - he got it orally. People told the stories of Jesus over and over until they told Mark who wrote them down.

Our faith got its start and built its foundation on an Oral Tradition. Word of mouth! **We got to know Jesus because they had mouths!**

Now as we all know ALLOT of information is still distributed via: the Mouth: ie the Oral tradition. And you can bet your Bibles we are a part of that Oral Tradition!

We talk about being a community; even a family. What binds the communities and the families you are in outside church. Its their stories, honestly told, about their traditions. Its the repeating of the stories from generation to generation.

Those stories we share are the glue that holds us together.

And to be a successful community, **we need to learn how to glue ourselves together as a church!**

We are doing it right now! In small groups! My bestest church experiences have been in small groups: the study groups with Herb, UTG 1 and 1.5! The PNC! Those times weren't always easy because we didn't always agree; but we came back together and we worked and we learned to love each other through the disagreements.

Now I probably, probably I was the giver of frustration as much or more than I was the receiver. But we made it: yes: Kelly Rohr still loves me.

Those were faithful, loving experiences for me: **those times felt like what church was supposed to feel like.**

Its that feeling of love we should all get when we are in church. Its not always perfect; but knowing regardless of the honesty we get; **we love one another.** Herb chastised me once during a lunch we had when he said: in a sort of too loud voice: "Come on; Steve : Its church." I think Im getting it now!

So how do we do this; as a big group; and where do we start!

Well: we need some rules: and maybe a refereee:

Slide: When at least two come together in God's name, God is in their midst.

When they gather, there are rules of appropriate conduct.

One rule deals with relationships. when conflict occurs. In the church it is better to let conflict be know. There; listening occurs in the context of God's love. Perceptions may change, causing different behavior. As a result Christ's body is strengthened.

We need to be honest, yet understanding. We need to remember that what binds us is greater than what divides us. We know we have God's unconditional love and just as importantly we have to know we have the unconditional love of each other.

So: we got the rules: so what do we talk about!

Slide: "provides a sanctuary where all persons are welcomed, where diversity is embraced and open discussion of faith questions is encouraged."

We have been down this path before but in today's world of heightened rhetoric it cannot hurt to revitalize it. **No other topic is more central to our church and to our future: we are an open church and all are welcome.**

Slide from Paul's letter to the Gallations: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

There is simply no room in our church for discrimination of any kind! The session is reading a book entitled: "Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations" and one of the chapters in it is entitled: The Practice of Radical Hospitality: and no where in that chapter does it say: the best way to be radically hospitable is to exclude a group: like: blue eyed girls or men over 6' tall!.

So: we have a topic to practice our gluing : now how do we start this exchange of ideas as a church; what might that forum look like: well - Im glad you asked.

In a recently published article, written by Thomas Schultz: author of a book called "Why Nobody Wants To Go To Church Anymore" this idea is presented:

Slide:"We suggest, to fuel participation and spiritual growth, that churches replace some one-way lecture time with actual two-way conversation, and be courageous enough to encourage differing viewpoints."

Whaaaaaatt! An open dialogue in church. Differing viewpoints! You gotta be kidding: how are we ever gonna do that?

Mr Schultz goes on to give us an idea:

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"We learned to be intentional about welcoming differences. We announce before and during discussions that "your thoughts are welcome; your doubts are welcome." We inform people that we can differ in our viewpoints while we maintain respect and love for one another."

Can we do this? Who knows... but I'd like to think we could. We should consider ways to make us more of a team; more of a community, more of a family; this is one idea: and it will require courage and patience and honest mouths and love.

But no matter what ideas we embrace we have a model for our goal: to be a family: From the Book of John; who tells us the mouth of Jesus said:

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"Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Ladies and gentlemen: This is church! It ought to be a safe place to be ourselves, a loving place, a place for all of us and any other humans that want to join us.

It ought to be a different place than any place else we go.

Only we can make it that way

