

Sunday, July 9, 2023
Psalm 104:24-34, I Corinthians 12:4-12
"Things are all Abuzz"
The Rev. Joan Withers Priest, preaching

So, this being my very first service ever in the Chapel in the Pines I thought, what a wonderful day to preach about bugs. That's right, I said bugs, insects. But first, a little more about our New Testament scripture passage, because of course, it all relates. In today's Epistle lesson, the apostle Paul is answering mail sent to him by the Corinthians. The people of Corinth had apparently asked a few questions about spiritual gifts, something we have been talking about for weeks. In particular they asked Paul to rank these gifts in order of importance. Which ones are better than others?! It appears that some people in Corinth believed the clearest sign of the direct presence of the power of the Spirit of God, was only in extraordinary and spectacular accomplishments, in miraculous and powerful expressions of speech. Paul's major purpose in this section was to stress the diversity and equality of all of the gifts of the Spirit. Paul shatters their spiritual snobbery by reminding them that everyone who confesses Jesus as savior is Spirit-filled, and each member of the church, each believer in Christ, is gifted. All of us.

Now, the body was a natural image for Paul to use because in spite of the differences in one's body parts and their functions, there is an obvious unity in any body, for all parts of the body need each other in order to function. It is the same with the church or any community. The church and here Paul is referring to the church universal, all churches, like even Dunns Corner Community Church. The church should be made up of people from diverse backgrounds, views, interests, and gifts. All are welcome here.

A church should be made up of all kinds of people who are walking in many different places on that journey, who serve in this place in a variety of ways. These gifts are intended for the church to strengthen it, to feed it, to encourage it, and to have the body of Christ empowered to do the works of Christ. And just like the Corinthians, we too need apostles or Elders and Deacons and Trustees to help organize and run all of the many areas of this congregation -- we too need people of wisdom and knowledge to help envision the future -- we too need people of faith to tell the good news to others and teach us about God -- we too need people who can speak to all people in a language they understand, who knows how to discern honesty, sincerity, understanding differences and shares a compassion for those differences -- we too need people who help care for those who are wounded by life, healers who are present with those in need, who know the power of prayer and the power of touch. These, Paul tells us are all equally important gifts of God's spirit.

Just like it takes a variety of people with a variety of different gifts to make up one church, I believe it takes many different kinds of bugs or insects who are also necessary in this world and we like them, necessary in a church. Bear with me, you'll catch on. With over 1.5 million species of insects, surely, we can find one who possess some of the same characteristics or gifts, that each one of us possesses.

Okay, so maybe I've been spending a little too much time in my garden these days, and been bitten by one too many horse fly -- those really hurt! - but let's have a little fun and talk about just a few of the different kinds of bugs, and their importance in today's world; which after the

careful study I have done, I believe are very similar to the different kinds of people who are all very important in today's church, like this one. So, open your minds and your imaginations and let's talk about bugs!

Let's start with the working insects - the bees, wasps and ants. Did you know that a bee can fly up to 60 miles in one day and honeybees have to make 10 million trips to collect enough nectar for the production of one pound of honey? Did you know that ants can lift and carry more than 50 times their weight? Have you seen the movie "A Bug's Life?" Without these stinging, annoying creatures most flowers would not bloom and grow, for over ½ of the entire world's crop population and 80% of the world's flowering plants, depend on pollination from these creatures, for they are the most successful and hard-working group of insects. That's why it's so scary that bees are declining in numbers.

Who do you know to be the bees, wasps or ants in this church, in this place? I believe they are the ones who are the busiest hard-working people of the church or community. The ones who are seen sewing for the sewing group, cooking for the Jonny Cake Center; fixing up homes for Habitat for Humanity; setting up a collation after a Memorial Service; volunteering hard labor to help their community and many others in the town of Westerly. Do we need these people in the church? You bet we do! Are you one of them?

Okay, let's move on to the biting insects - the flies, mosquitoes, fleas, and maybe ticks. Now while these insects have been known to spread disease, suck the blood out of animals and humans, they do have many great qualities as well! Mosquitoes do provide food for our beautiful birds and Ticks for those pretty guinea hens and turkeys. Fleas put Olympic athletes to shame, did you know that they can jump 110 times their length. When a flea jumps, it accelerates 20 times faster than the space shuttle, and have been on the earth for at least 165 million years. Did you know that flies have extremely sensitive tongues, can detect sugar with their feet, can sense any kind of movement; and that they have thousands of individual lenses in their eyes so that can see in 3D?

Who do you know to be the flies, mosquitoes and fleas in this church? I believe they are the ones – and I may be stretching things a bit here - but maybe they are the ones who really notice things, who through years of attending here, really know this congregation, who can sense things about people, who see things as if they have hundreds of eyes, who see that a person isn't doing too well that day, that someone who is always present in church hasn't been here for a while, that another person really needs support, encouragement, a card, a call, a prayer. Do we need these people in the church? You bet we do! Are you one of them?

Okay, let's really challenge our thinking a bit, how about beetles and cockroaches. While these insects feed off the dead, are basically cannibals, and spread real diseases like tuberculosis, typhoid and leprosy, they are the ones who can endure the harshest of conditions and remain the strongest among all insects. Did you know that cockroaches can live up to 20 days without food and 14 days without water? That they can flatten their bodies and crawl through a crack thinner than a dime, that they'll eat anything – leather, hair, glue, they can even live off the toothpaste residue on your toothbrush! And that the ladybug – some years we have hundreds of ladybugs at our home. The lady beetle is very beneficial for she can consume up to 5,000 aphids in her lifetime. And these bugs are very helpful because they feed on plants and fungi and they eat those insects which cause real damage to crops and plants.

So, who do you know who is like the beetles, lady bugs, and cockroaches in the church? Maybe, just maybe, they are the ones who are the strongest and the wisest. I believe they are the ones who are always there, who have endured a lot of different hardships in this life, but their faith remains strong. They are the ones who know the past, known real pain, real sorrow, real fear, have learned from it, and can help others through tough times because they have lived through it all. Do we need these people in the church? You bet we do! Are you one of them?

But there is one group of insects who really don't belong. You know the ones. The termites, locusts, grasshoppers, and crickets. Some years we could add the gypsy moths – when they come through there isn't one leaf left on any tree on the property! These insects tend to live in large groups, form bands or swarms which travel great distances, rapidly stripping fields and damaging crops. They also make loud noises. While termites feed on wood or other dead plant material, destroying homes; locusts and grasshoppers and such, feed off living plant matter. Face it, mainly they cause big trouble.

I think of all the groups I've mentioned, these are the ones we need to be cautious about. I believe the termites and locusts are the ones who attract others to their group because they are the loudest, the most vocal about their opinions. They are the ones who get others excited by spreading rumors, false information, and spread it like a swarm. So, watch out for termites and locusts, grasshoppers and gypsy moths among us. And I pray you are not one of them!

Let's move on to one of my favorite insects, the fireflies. Who here hasn't a favorite summertime memory of catching fireflies in a jar and watching them light up the night. But did you know that in some areas of the world like Malaysia, large groups of fireflies synchronize their flashes to light up a huge area of land all at the same time? You do know that the reason they light their tails is to attract others, a mate in particular.

Who are the fireflies you know? I believe they are the people who light up a room when they enter it and it isn't by flame or sunlight, it is the light of love shining through them. I believe they are the ones who attract others to them, those who want to know more about how they live so peacefully, so fully in God's light. They aren't putting on a show with their light, they don't even realize how impressive, how inspiring they are to others. Do we need these people in the church? You bet we do. I wonder if you are one of those.

Bugs, insects, we could name hundreds more, we love them, we hate them, but we all agree, we need them – at least most of them! And I haven't even mentioned commercial products they produce such as cotton, silk, honey, soap and salt. Or the inspiration they give to poets and preachers. But now maybe you agree, maybe we are a little bit like them. All a bug has to do, all an insect knows how to do, is to be what God created them to be – to do what they are gifted in doing. And so should we.

As one minister states, "The God of the Bible created light out of darkness, order out of chaos, life out of dust and rainbows out of rain. He brought freedom out of slavery, victory out of defeat and forgiveness out of guilt. It is He who makes sunsets out of smog, flowers out of scorched earth, cucumbers out of compost, hope out of despair, and yes, beauty out of bugs. Who else?" (1)

Jesus called all people, regardless of their status, gender, wealth, power or even religious appearance. Whether we serve God within the walls of the church or outside the walls of the church, quietly or in groups – we are to remember that while there are so many different gifts

we all possess, it is the same Spirit of God who gives them. And we are one body working together. So what is your gift – is it to teach, to pray, to organize, to speak, to listen, to sing, to cook, to hug, to inspire, – whatever it is we are called by God to use them. And when we share that gift with others, we become that one body in Christ. Like insects, we do what God created us to do.

And so, I have one more category of insects. Those that teach us about our future, our future life in Christ, our eternal life in Christ. You know the ones, the dragonflies and butterflies. Wondered when I was going to mention those, right?! These are the insects which can change dramatically right before our eyes; these are the ones who almost die in a way and transform, turning from caterpillar or water bug into a new creation - a dazzling colorful flying insect.

They are the ones who teach us to live with the certainty that even though there will be times in our lives when we may not feel worthy, when we may have great struggles, when we may feel lowly and sometimes have to crawl or swim along, lost and alone; that there is something magnificent on the other side. That we are constantly being transformed into a new creation. They are the ones who teach us that with God's help, we will become something more, something everlasting, something beautiful and brand new.

A few years ago, I visited a man in the hospital who was in his final hours and prayed with him and his wife. I officiated at his memorial service, days later. One year after his death his wife came, to give me a book on the meaning of the Dragonfly and told me this story. At the very moment of her husband's passing, she looked out the window and on the windowsill, sat a beautiful, shiny dragonfly. That dragonfly or another, who knows, would show up again and again, some saw one at the graveside service sitting near the grave, some at the memorial service on the communion table, others at the reception sitting on a table, or at her home on her windowsill. It became a symbol to her of her husband's spirit, remaining forever by her side. On the year anniversary of his death she was walking outside, and something flew right at her. Instinctively, like we all would, she swatted it away. The insect came back and hit her directly on the nose – it was a dragonfly. Later that day she was sitting in her room, a little sad, a little lonely and noticed a stone on her dresser. It was a stone she had picked up one day when her and her husband were walking on the beach several years before, it was special to her because it was shaped kind of like a heart. For some reason on that day she turned the stone over and noticed for the first time that on the back of that stone was a perfectly fossilized, dragonfly.

So, the next time you see a bug, before you go to swat it away – stop and think for a moment of what kind of bug you are, who God made you to be, how you were created in God's image and inspired with God's spiritual gifts in you. For we are all part of the Body of Christ, we all have gifts of the spirit. I pray you discover your gifts and utilize them here and in God's beautiful world. And always look out for the dragonflies and the butterflies, because they are the ones who teach us that with God's help, one day we too, will learn how to fly, and live forever in eternal life. May it be so, Amen.

(1) Solliday, Rev. Jowl Mark, CampusCrosswalk, "Beauty out of Bugs!" 4/25/06.