

Pastor's Letter – December, 2015

Life is a relentless teacher. And I found an unlikely instructor in a weathered old church sign – **OUR** church sign. Our sign has stood as a quiet sentinel for decades, announcing our name, hours of worship, and current pastor. And, as is the case with so many steadfast servants, it has come to need some care and attention.

In a fit of naïve ambition, I fired up my electric sander last week thinking I'd give the sign a simple face-lift and a coat of paint before the rude winter winds begin to blow. As we all know, rarely is a project as "simple" as we think. After a few minutes of sanding, and finding wood mysteriously giving way to dust at an alarming rate, it became clear to me that the sign would need a transfusion of lumber in order to have something upon which to put the paint.

As the first exploratory surgery continued...and rot led to more rot...I became increasingly convinced that the sign really didn't look **THAT** bad in the first place. Maybe it could sit tight for another winter and let some other victim...I mean carpenter...give it a try next season.

From a distance, almost anything looks pretty – with enough distance. (One exception: I can't stand **FAR** enough from a mirror in the morning to look pretty!) Prior to my meddling, our beloved church sign wasn't too shabby from, say, 500 feet. But, as with hair-dressers and manicurists, a carpenter with a decent set of glasses sees all manner of blemishes. It comes with getting "up close and personal."

Of course, it's essential to get close in order to make repairs. Seldom have I worked on a wood-working project from more than 25 feet away. I don't even think that almighty Home Depot sells saws **THAT** long.

What's true for wood-working is true for us humans. We can't attend to the needs of one another from a distance. Nor can we appreciate the intricacy with which we are made. The psalmist proclaims that God knows our inward parts, having knitted us together in our mother's womb. (**Psalm 139**). And that's all well and good. But sometimes we need someone "with skin on" to get close enough to offer compassion, kindness and care.

Though I'd **LOVE** to have my teeth cleaned by a dental hygienist who never gets within 10 feet of my mouth...it's just not very practical. I don't care **HOW** many computer screens they pack around the chair.

After my initial dismay, I persevered with the church sign project, "re-purposing" some old fascia board from an elderly barn for use in replacing rotted parts of the sign. After backing up 7 steps to move ahead 2, the sign was eventually set for caulk and paint. (I won't say which I used more!) And she now stands with a new look and vastly improved self-esteem.

I don't think it's hard to see the application to life on the human plain. As we draw near, we **WILL** see the rot and the rust. But we will **ALSO** be in a place to gently touch those places of need and offer care. In so doing, I think we become the hands and heart of Christ.

But don't take my word for it – look for a sign!

Blessings to you all...

Tim