

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How many of you have ever attended a performance of Circus Flora? Did anyone make it to a show this summer in Grand Center? For those they may not know about Circus Flora, it is a one-ring European-style circus based right here in St. Louis. It has been performing here to the delight and joy of generations of St. Louisans for more than forty years. It combines storytelling, with horse acts, jugglers, clowns, trapeze acts, and of course, the Flying Wallenda Family.

Each year it is a little different, but each year it remains the same – the combination of many parts dedicated to the idea that circus is a transformative experience that leaves the world in a better place than it was before the show.

It was about twenty years ago that Circus Flora was closing. It had run out of money and did not have a permanent place to perform. Then Mayor Vincent Schoemehl came to me and said, “Can you believe Circus Flora is closing?” I said, “No, that is a shame.” He said, “Wouldn’t it be great if Circus Flora was resurrected with a permanent home in Grand Center for generations to enjoy?” And, as one is want to

say to Vince Schoemehl's , "big ideas", I said, "Sure, Vince, that sounds great." And then he said, "Wouldn't it be great if you lead that effort?" To which I said, "No."

But that was never a word Vince had much use for.

I did help Circus Flora find its footing, and with the help of many, many people, Circus Flora established a permanent home in Grand Center. It is a St. Louis gem. It is an institution. It is a joy.

While working with the circus, for those years, I was able to also make a documentary film about the performers and crew. I learned why they did what they did, why it is so meaningful to them, and why most of them were fourth, fifth, sixth, eight generation inhabitants of the Circus realm. Theirs was a vocation, in which each part was equally important to the whole, and without which, the whole was only half.

From the patriarch's and matriarchs all the way down to the pooper scoopers, they were all part of the family. And the purpose of the family was the preservation and presentation of one-ring European-style circus, and the joy it bestows upon the world. The existence and success of Circus Flora depends both upon Tino Wallenda striding along the high

wire and the crew member down below willing to break his fall should there ever be a misstep. Because, the Flying Wallendas never use a net. So, they rely upon the others.

Now, I would ask you to consider the microcosm of Circus Flora as I go back over a portion of Paul's letter to the Romans:

Do not "think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us:..."

I can see Paul's words in the world of Circus Flora.

Now look at the bigger world around us. Go beyond these walls.

And then, think about Paul's exhortation. Sadly, I do not recognize

out there

Paul's call to the Romans. I do not recognize Paul's paradigm in the ⁺ world like I do in the life of Circus Flora.

I do not see "sober judgment" but rather, hurtful, and even hateful, judgment. I see hierarchical adjudication. I see a caste structure

delineating us and them. I do not find "one body in Christ". I see many individual bodies claiming Christ to the exclusion of others.

Paul says, "[W]e, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." And being one body in Christ, we are called by the teachings of Christ, by the example of Christ, by the will of Christ. Anything less weakens the body of Christ.

Paul poses

~~There are~~ two key questions ~~posed by Paul~~, when he says, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." First, what God-given gifts do each of us possess, and second are you recognizing and acknowledging the God-given gifts of others.

Each of us is a necessary and welcome gene in the DNA strand that is Body of Christ. Find your gift and then embrace it. Relish in it. Rejoice in it. It is God-given, *to you.*

And similarly, recognize that there are an endless array of God-given gifts that others possess. They too make up the Body of Christ, equal in God's eyes. *Think about it — do you want to be* ~~Think of what would happen if the acrobats of the acrobatic troupe following the horse act if the Circus Flora slipped on what was left by the horse act but for the crew's~~ *proper scooper removal crew does not do its job first?*

~~pooper scooper removal efforts.~~ See, everyone has a gift – an important gift – that God has assigned us. There are no small gifts. *14-2-2017*

I'd like to end on the words of Paul in the form of a prayer. Let us pray:

God, do not allow us to be conformed to this world, but instead be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may discern what is your will – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Amen.