

I Corinthians 12:12-31

January 27, '19

“ALL TOGETHER NOW”

**AT THE VERY END OF THAT PASSAGE – OUR
LECTIONARY EPISTLE READING FOR TODAY - YOU KNOW
WHAT THAT “*MORE EXCELLENT WAY*” IS, DON’T YOU?**

**I COULD PROBABLY SAY – “*OKAY, ALL TOGETHER NOW*” &
MANY OF YOU WOULD IMMEDIATELY RESPOND BY SAYING,
“*IF I SPEAK IN THE TONGUES OF MEN & ANGELS, BUT HAVE
NOT LOVE...*”**

**AND EVEN IF YOU DON’T REMEMBER IT ALL & IF YOUR
EYESIGHT IS GOOD ENOUGH, YOU CAN SIMPLY LOOK AT
OUR BULLETIN COVER & THERE IT IS!**

**THIS IS WHAT LEADS TO THE LOVE CHAPTER OF PAUL
AS HE WRITES TO THE BELIEVERS IN CORINTH.**

**THE CITY OF CORINTH WAS NOT AN EASY PLACE TO DO
MINISTRY.**

IT WASN’T AN EASY PLACE TO ESTABLISH A CHURCH.

**CORINTH WAS A SEAPORT, MAKING IT A CULTURAL
MELTINGPOT OF VARIOUS PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEAS.**

**THE CHURCH IN CORINTH WAS MADE UP OF A VARIETY
OF PEOPLE WITH ALL SORTS OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS -
EDUCATIONALLY, ETHNICALLY, SOCIALLY, VOCATIONALLY.**

PAUL SOUGHT TO BRING UNITY TO SUCH DIVERSITY AND TO DO SO, HE USED THIS GREAT ILLUSTRATION OF THE CHURCH AS A BODY.

CORINTH WAS AN ANCIENT GREEK CITY, SO PAUL USED LANGUAGE THAT WAS FAMILIAR TO THE GREEKS.

THIS WAS A TECHNIQUE THAT HE FREQUENTLY USED.

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS, WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE ATHENIANS HE USED QUOTES FROM THEIR PHILOSOPHERS IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN THEIR ATTENTION.

HE DOES THE SAME THING HERE.

YOU SEE, THIS ILLUSTRATION ABOUT THE BODY ISN'T ORIGINAL WITH PAUL.

HE BORROWED IT FROM THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS.

FOR EXAMPLE, PLATO SAID, *"IF MY FINGER HAS PAIN, THE BODY WOULD SPEAK UP AND SAY, 'I HAVE PAIN.'"*

SENECA SAID, *"ALL THIS YOU SEE, IN WHICH THINGS DIVINE AND THINGS HUMAN ARE INCLUDED, IS ONE; WE ARE MEMBERS OF A GREAT BODY."*

SO YOU SEE, THIS WASN'T A NEW IDEA PAUL WAS INTRODUCING TO THE CORINTHIANS.

BUT IT WAS ALWAYS A FAVORITE ANALOGY OF HIS.

WHENEVER HE WANTED TO ADEQUATELY DESCRIBE THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, THE ONE DESCRIPTION HE ALWAYS CAME BACK TO, WAS THIS.

IN ROMANS, EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS AS WELL AS I CORINTHIANS, PAUL MAKES OVER 30 REFERENCES TO THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST.

A PROBLEM WE RUN INTO WITH THIS ANALOGY IS THAT WHEN WE THINK OF OUR *OWN* BODIES, MOST OF US DON'T THINK OF THEM IN A POSITIVE WAY.

IT'S TOO FAT OR TOO SKINNY, TOO SHORT OR TOO TALL.

IT'S BUMPY OR LUMPY OR JUST PLAIN UGLY.

MANY OF YOU WILL REMEMBER BOB MOYE OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY.

BOB WAS A MASTER OF ONE-LINERS & I REMEMBER BOB, IN HIS BEST RODNEY DANGERFIELD IMITATION, SAYING THAT WHEN HE WAS A KID, HE WAS SO UGLY HIS PARENTS TOOK HIM EVERYWHERE THEY WENT JUST SO THEY WOULDN'T HAVE TO KISS HIM GOOD-BYE!

THAT'S THE WAY MOST OF US FEEL ABOUT OUR OWN BODY AND YET, HERE'S PAUL, COMPARING THE CHURCH TO THE BODY.

LET'S LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT THIS COMPARISON.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER YOUR OWN BODY, EACH PART OF IT HAS SOMETHING IN COMMON & THAT SOMETHING IS - YOU!

YOU DON'T HAVE A LEG THAT'S SOMEONE ELSE'S.

EACH INDIVIDUAL PART OF YOUR BODY HAS "YOU" IN COMMON.

YOU ARE THE COMMON DENOMINATOR THAT TIES EVERYTHING TOGETHER.

IN THE SAME WAY, THE CHURCH HAS A COMMON FOCAL POINT AND THAT FOCAL POINT IS JESUS CHRIST.

THE PARTS ARE DIFFERENT.

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER & YET WE ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME BODY WITH JESUS CHRIST AS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR THAT TIES US ALL TOGETHER.

LIKE OUR PHYSICAL BODIES, THE BODY OF CHRIST HAS TO BE MADE UP OF DIFFERENT PARTS.

GOD DIDN'T MAKE US ALL IDENTICAL.

IT'S A GOOD THING WE'RE *NOT*, ISN'T IT?

THINK ABOUT THAT.

DOES THE CHURCH REALLY NEED ANOTHER YOU?

I KNOW IT DOESN'T NEED ANOTHER *ME*!

AND WHAT IF THE CHURCH *WERE* MADE UP OF NOTHING MORE THAN A BUNCH OF "YOUS"? OR A BUNCH OF "ME'S"?

THERE'D BE A WHOLE LOT OF THINGS THAT WOULDN'T GET DONE, WOULDN'T THERE?

JUST AS WITH THE BODY, WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

WITHIN THE CHURCH, EACH ONE OF US HAS SOMETHING WE CAN DO.

THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN OR *WILL* DO.

NO ONE CAN SAY, "*I'M NOT NEEDED*" OR "*I'M NOT IMPORTANT.*"

VINCE LOMBARDI, THE LEGENDARY COACH OF THE GREEN BAY PACKERS, WAS ADDRESSING A GROUP ONE NIGHT.

HE WAS ASKED WHAT MADE FOR A GREAT FOOTBALL TEAM.

HE SAID, "*THERE ARE A LOT OF COACHES WITH GOOD BALL CLUBS WHO KNOW THE FUNDAMENTALS AND HAVE PLENTY OF DISCIPLINE BUT STILL DON'T WIN THE GAME.*"

HE SAID, "*THERE'S A THIRD ELEMENT THAT'S MISSING. IF YOU'RE GOING TO PLAY TOGETHER AS A TEAM, YOU'VE GOT TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER.*

YOU'VE GOT TO LOVE EACH OTHER.

EACH PLAYER HAS TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT GUY AND SAYING TO HIMSELF, 'IF I DON'T BLOCK THAT MAN, PAUL'S GOING TO GET HIS LEGS BROKEN.

I HAVE TO DO MY JOB WELL IN ORDER THAT HE CAN DO HIS.'"

"THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDIOCRITY & GREATNESS," LOMBARDI SAID THAT NIGHT, "IS THE FEELING THESE GUYS HAVE FOR EACH OTHER."

THINK ABOUT THAT IN RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

IN THE HEALTHY CHURCH, EACH MEMBER LEARNS TO CARE FOR EVERY OTHER MEMBER.

IF VINCE LOMBARDI COULD EXPECT MEMBERS OF HIS FOOTBALL TEAM TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER & PROTECT ONE ANOTHER, SURELY WE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO DO THE SAME WITHIN THE CHURCH!

LAST WEEK, SOMEONE SAID TO ME, "YOU DON'T GET SICK VERY OFTEN, DO YOU – OR IS IT JUST THAT YOU HIDE IT WELL WHEN YOU ARE?"

I HAD TO BE HONEST AND SAY, "NO, YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THE FIRST PART – I DON'T GET SICK VERY OFTEN.

BUT YOU'RE DEAD WRONG ABOUT THE SECOND BECAUSE WHEN I DO GET SICK, IT'S SO RARE FOR ME THAT I DON'T HIDE IT AT ALL!

SOMETHING THAT MOST PEOPLE PROBABLY WOULDN'T EVEN NOTICE WILL MAKE ME WHINE LIKE A BABY BECAUSE I'M JUST NOT ACCUSTOMED TO FEELING BAD!"

IT MIGHT BE NOTHING MORE THAN A COLD OR STOMACH ACHE.

IT MIGHT BE MY BACK.

MAYBE IT'S A HEADACHE OR AN EARACHE.

IF ONE PART OF ME HURTS, THE REST OF ME HURTS.

THAT'S WHAT PAUL SAYS HERE.

"IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER TOGETHER WITH IT."

THE ANALOGY OF THE BODY WORKS PERFECTLY HERE, DOESN'T IT?

IT SAYS THAT WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER & WHEN ONE OF US ENDURES HARDSHIP, PAIN, SORROW OR LOSS, WE ALL EXPERIENCE IT.

WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THIS BODY & IT'S VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ONE PART OF THE BODY TO SUFFER WITHOUT THE REST OF THE BODY EXPERIENCING THE PAIN.

LOOK AROUND YOU – WHEN THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU OR BEHIND YOU – WHEN THE ONE NEXT TO YOU OR ACROSS THE AISLE FROM YOU – GOES THROUGH HARD TIMES, *YOU* BEAR THOSE HARD TIMES WITH THEM.

WHAT PAUL IS TELLING US HERE IS THAT IF WE ARE TRULY THE BODY OF CHRIST, WE FEEL THINGS TOGETHER & WE ENDURE THEM TOGETHER & WE GET THROUGH THEM TOGETHER.

THE FLIP SIDE OF THIS IS THAT, NOT ONLY ARE YOU BEARING THE BURDENS OF *OTHERS* - THEY'RE BEARING *YOUR* BURDENS.

WHAT HE'S SAYING IS THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO EXPERIENCE THE DARKNESS OF LIFE'S TRIALS ALONE.

I REMEMBER, AS A TEEN-AGER, GETTING A LITTLE BOOK OF INSPIRATIONAL SAYINGS AS A BIRTHDAY PRESENT ONE YEAR.

I LOVED READING THROUGH THAT BOOK AND COMMITTING SOME OF THOSE QUOTATIONS TO MEMORY.

IT WAS MY FIRST INTRODUCTION TO THE MOVING WORDS OF JOHN DONNE: "*NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ENTIRE OF ITSELF....EVERY MAN IS A PIECE OF THE CONTINENT, A PART OF THE MAIN. ANY MAN'S DEATH DIMINISHES ME BECAUSE I AM A PART OF MANKIND. THEREFORE, NEVER SEND TO KNOW FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS; IT TOLLS FOR THEE.*"

DONNE HAS EXPANDED THIS WHOLE IDEA TO INCLUDE, NOT JUST THOSE WHO ARE PART OF OUR OWN FAMILY OR OUR OWN COMMUNITY OR OUR OWN CHURCH.

"ANYONE'S DEATH DIMINISHES ME...."

**WE HEAR THE TOLL OF THAT BELL & WE HEAR IT
CALLING US TO RESPOND IN WHATEVER WAY WE CAN TO
RELIEVE THE SUFFERING OF ANOTHER.**

***“IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER TOGETHER WITH
IT...”***

**BUT NOTICE THAT PAUL SAYS SOMETHING ELSE HERE:
*“IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL REJOICE TOGETHER WITH
IT.”***

**THIS IS THE COMPLETION OF THE CHURCH AT ITS
FINEST.**

**WE MOURN WITH THOSE WHO MOURN & WE REJOICE
WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE.**

**WHEN A BABY IS BORN, WHEN A YOUNG PERSON IS
BAPTIZED, WHEN SOMEONE IS UNITED IN MARRIAGE, WHEN
A HEALTH BATTLE IS WON, WHEN A NEW JOB IS SECURED,
WHEN A GRADUATION TAKES PLACE, WE REJOICE
TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THAT EXPERIENCE.**

**WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER – IN GOOD TIMES & IN
BAD TIMES.**

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

WE HAVE ALL BEEN GIVEN GIFTS TO USE.

**WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER, WITHOUT WHICH,
THE CHURCH IS SERIOUSLY HINDERED.**

WE CAN’T ALL DO THE SAME THINGS & YET

EVERYONE'S ROLE IS VITALLY IMPORTANT.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST SUMMER JOB I EVER HAD.

I WAS A STOCK BOY AT THE J.L. HUDSON COMPANY IN DOWNTOWN DETROIT – AT THE TIME, THE TALLEST DEPARTMENT STORE IN THE WORLD.

I WORKED ON THE 13TH FLOOR IN SMALL APPLIANCES.

AFTER A COUPLE WEEKS OF WORK, MY SUPERVISOR GAVE ME AN ASSIGNMENT THAT WAS INTENDED TO BE MY JOB FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SUMMER.

I WAS SENT TO A STOCK ROOM TO ASSEMBLE BARBEQUE GRILLS THAT HAD BEEN PURCHASED AND BEEN PAID FOR TO BE PRE-ASSEMBLED.

IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT ME, YOU KNOW THAT I WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SUITED FOR BRAIN SURGERY THAN TO ASSEMBLE BARBEQUE GRILLS!

THE FIRST DAY, I MANAGED TO SUCCESSFULLY ASSEMBLE ONE GRILL IN MY 8-HOUR SHIFT – AND I USE THE WORD “SUCCESSFULLY” VERY LOOSELY BECAUSE I HAD VISIONS OF THE NEW OWNER OPENING THE LID & HAVING THE ENTIRE GRILL COLLAPSE AT THEIR FEET!

THE ENTIRE FIRST WEEK I MANAGED ONE GRILL A DAY & AT THE END OF THE WEEK – ONE OF THE MOST MISERABLE WEEKS I'VE EVER SPENT IN MY ENTIRE LIFE – I

ASKED MY SUPERVISOR HOW MUCH PEOPLE WERE PAYING TO HAVE THEIR GRILL PRE-ASSEMBLED.

HE TOLD ME FIVE DOLLARS.

I DID A QUICK CALCULATION. I WAS BEING PAID \$1.60 AN HOUR.

I SAID, “*YOU KNOW HUDSON’S IS LOSING SEVEN DOLLARS & EIGHTY CENTS FOR EVERY GRILL I ASSEMBLE.*”

THE NEXT WEEK, SOMEONE ELSE WAS ASSIGNED TO GRILL ASSEMBLY!

THE THING IS, THOUGH, THIS GUY WAS TURNING THEM OUT AT A RATE OF ONE AN HOUR!

HE HAD A GIFT FOR DOING IT.

I DIDN’T.

WITHIN THE CHURCH, EVERY ONE OF US HAS SOMETHING WE CAN DO.

IN THE SECOND CENTURY, THE EARLY CHURCH LEADER TERTULLIAN WAS DESCRIBING HOW OUTSIDERS SAW THE CHRISTIANS.

THESE ARE THE WORDS HE WROTE ABOUT OUTSIDERS LOOKING AT CHRISTIANS:

“*LOOK,’ THEY SAY, ‘HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER’ (FOR THEY THEMSELVES HATE ONE ANOTHER); ‘AND SEE HOW THEY ARE READY TO DIE FOR EACH OTHER’ (FOR THEY THEMSELVES ARE READIER TO KILL EACH OTHER).*”

THE WORLD HASN'T CHANGED MUCH SINCE THEN, HAS IT?

THERE ARE STILL THOSE WHO WOULD SOONER HATE & KILL ONE ANOTHER THAN LOVE & DIE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO BE SOMETHING DIFFERENT. WE'RE CALLED TO BE SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THE WORLD HAS COME TO EXPECT.

WE'RE CALLED TO GIVE OURSELVES COMPLETELY TO JESUS CHRIST & BE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY.

WE'RE CALLED TO SERVE & TO LOVE.

"IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, WE SUFFER TOGETHER. IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, WE REJOICE TOGETHER."

THE REST OF THE WORLD LONGS TO BE PART OF A BODY LIKE THAT.

WE NEED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT'S WHAT THEY SEE WHEN THEY LOOK AT US – THAT THEY SEE THE BODY OF CHRIST AS CHRIST MEANT IT TO BE – THAT THEY SEE US BEING *"ALL TOGETHER NOW"* AS SERVANTS & FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

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