

McCabe United Methodist Church

“All For One...”

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

November 8, 2009

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Our scripture lesson this morning comes from 1st Corinthians, Chapter 12, starting with verse 12. I'm going to skip a few verses in the middle, but it still gives us the full idea of what is going on. "The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. Some of us are Jews and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves and others are free, but God's spirit baptized each of us and makes us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same spirit. Our bodies don't have just one part, they have many parts. Suppose a foot says I am not a hand and I am not a part of the body. Wouldn't the foot still belong to the body? Or, suppose an ear says I'm not an eye and so I am not a part of the body. Wouldn't the ear still belong to the body? If our bodies were only an eye we would not be able to hear and if they were only an ear we wouldn't be able to smell a thing, but God has put all parts of the body together in a way that he decided is the best. A body isn't really a body unless there is more than one part. It takes many parts to make a single body, that's why the eye cannot say that they don't need the hands and that's also why the head cannot say it does not need the feet. God put our bodies together in such a way that even the parts that seem least important are valuable. He did this to make all parts of the body work together smoothly with each part caring about the others. If one part of our body hurts, we hurt all over, and if one part of the body is honored, then the whole body will be happy. Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body. First God chose some people to be apostles and prophets and teachers for the church. But he also chose some to work miracles or heal the sick or help others or be leaders or speak different kinds of languages. Not everyone is an apostle and not everyone is a prophet, not everyone is a teacher, not everyone can work miracles, not everyone can heal the sick and not everyone can speak different kinds of languages and not everyone can tell what these languages mean, but I want you to desire the best gifts so I will show you a much better way." The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Let me start with a little bit of a story. They look like you're average elementary age kids sitting around the circle, one shares that his parents took him to McDonalds yesterday and that he had a Happy Meal, still plays with the toy. The other shows you

his scraped knees and tells you the details of his fall yesterday and another informs you that his upcoming birthday party will be celebrated at the science center. But as you keep listening, it occurs to you that these are not normal children. The Happy Meal lover informs you that his French fries from his Happy Meal were cooked on a Sigma Model 3000. He can tell you the temperature, the type of oil and all the mechanics on how it works. Mr. scabby knees informs you that his patella was not broke in the fall nor were any of his other 205 bones as he starts to list each one. And the boy who is going to the science center for his birthday informs you that he is going to check out the atomize optics on the wall at the science center. What he doesn't tell you is that his only other guests at his party will be his parents and his grandparents because he has no "normal" or "real" friends.

These children have been deemed little professors. They have a type of autism known as Asperger syndrome. It was discovered in 1944 by Hans Asperger who identified these autistic children who, although they were autistic, were extremely articulate and yet they suffer the same isolation from those around them that other autistic children struggle with. They don't understand what we kind of absorb naturally, just through growing up. That somebody who is crying is sad or that somebody who is laughing is happy or somebody whose eyebrows are scrunched is either angry or frustrated. They don't instinctively pick up on these types of cues and that's just the beginning. They are so lost in their world of imagination and information and ideas that it doesn't occur to them that nobody else in the room is listening to them drone on about their long list of details. About the deep fat fryer or the bones of the body or the display at the science center. It doesn't occur to them. These Asperger children are brilliant, but they have a limited social intelligence and they fail to see how they connect with other people, be it family, or friends or community.

In today's scripture passage Paul is dealing with the church in Corinth. It might be a little much to say this is an Asperger church, but they are not far from it. Extremely gifted though they are, as we read through the book of Corinthians, there is every reason to believe they exercised their gifts with very little regard for how it affected their brothers and sisters in Christ, or how it affected the larger community. They simply took their gifts and their abilities and their interests and their desires and expressed or worked out their spirituality in isolation and only to the extent that it supported their agenda or what they wanted. So Paul brings in this startling image, this image that is familiar for us, but for the Christians in Paul's day this was revolutionary. That they were part of a body, and just like a body has many parts, the church has many parts. And that the body needs all of those parts to function and to function well. So he kind of comes up with this ridiculous illustration, the eye can't say to the hands I don't need

you, or it can't say I'm not a part of the body, it simply does not work that way. The whole is greater than the individual parts. And the individual parts cannot simply decide to abdicate or step out of the body. It is simply what they are. Well, for Paul, dealing with this Corinth church, they used their gifts and abilities but it only served to break apart community, because they failed to see how they related to that larger body or to the whole community and so they were an Asperger church.

The point that Paul makes in this passage, and actually in the whole book of First Corinthians, is this idea of who cares if you have this ability to prophesy or to teach or the ability to heal or to speak tongues or interpret those tongues. Who cares if you have this specific gift or that gift if you do not know how to love your brother and sister. What he is talking about here is if you do not know how to love your brother and sister in Christ with that specific gift, it would be better to not have it at all. Actually verse 31, actually leaves us hanging. "Paul says I will show you a much better way." That's First Corinthians 13, a chapter you may have heard about or be familiar with. It's the famous love chapter----"If I could speak in the tongues of angels and have not love," and he goes on to give great detail. The whole context of that passage, the whole context of Corinthians is learning how to serve or use the gifts, the abilities, the tools we have at our disposal to serve, and to love and to build others up in the body of Christ and in the world around us.

You would think that the church would just kind of get this naturally. When they do surveys on why people join churches, one of the top responses is a desire for that sense of community and to be a part of something greater than themselves. So, you would think we would hold onto this, but we are not immune to the culture around us. Rome in Paul's day had a very strong sense of individuality and asserting your will and being unique and different, not unlike our culture today. Just as the Christians in Corinth were not immune from that cultural context, neither are we. So we have to make that connection that belonging to the community of Christ, the church, means that we as individuals need to belong to the community of Christ. We need to open ourselves up to one another. Because, it's not just community in the abstract, it gets very specific.

Often what the church looks like is a body builder who has studied the science, they eat the right food, they know the exercise routine, and really has a desire to have this great right arm. Pumps iron with that right arm, and the different one where you lean over the bench, and one-armed pull ups and one-handed pushups. Has a great right arm, ripped, the muscles are bulging. Well, after a couple of years of working out just your right arm, what's that going to look like? It would look like a circus act,

wouldn't it. It would be very odd. And yet sometimes the body of Christ might lack balance like a body builder who might just work out his right arm.

Doctors have a word for imbalance, or when our bodies are out of balance, it's called illness. The church is a body, and the church too can be out of balance. So we need to take these words from Paul very seriously, that we are a body and that God has called each of us here as individuals to be a part of this body. God didn't just call us randomly, I think we are all here for a purpose and a reason. God called us knowing our gifts and our personalities, our strengths and our weaknesses. He needed those strengths, those gifts, that personality, those strengths, those weaknesses, he needed who you are in this place. That's why you're here. That's why he called us together. The great part is, is your strengths are different than mine and your gifts are different than mine. Your strengths balance my weaknesses and your personality compliments my personality and as we all seek to build one another up, it's this magnificent puzzle that fits together and creates a beautiful picture.

We need each other, for the balance, for the strengthening, for the encouragement. Christians do not thrive individually. True enough, you can worship God out on the boat or walking the shelter belts as you're trying to shoot down one of those elusive pheasants, but that better not be the norm. Missing worship, missing out on the community of Christ, the body of Christ cannot be the norm if we are going to thrive as Christians. We need each other and we need this body.

This was God's idea, this was Christ's idea. He organized his first disciples into a little church and he sent them out to make churches, even to the ends of the earth. This was his idea, his best plan for growing Christians and for making disciples and for transforming the world. But, we don't do it individually, we do it as a body.

Just over a year ago I gave the challenge on our kickoff Sunday last year to have a place in the church or a place where you grow spiritually and then a place where you serve in or through McCabe. So, looking back over the last year and if you weren't here just pick up that context now, how have you done in terms of nurturing your faith over this last year and how have you done in serving the body of Christ over this last year? Here's the challenge, because it's not just about taking up space in a Sunday school class, or it's not just about filling a position in a committee or a ministry team or the choir, or any of the groups or any of the things we do here at McCabe as the body of Christ. But of being in that place in such a way that we actually share our struggles and our insights, or strengths and our weaknesses, that we share our lives with one another. Because, the body of Christ, there is that big picture or that abstract idea, but it gets

very specific and it gets specific when we start forming relationships with one another that are deeper than simply, how's the weather, that casual conversation, that surface living. We need to go deeper because we need one another. But, that will require that at times we set aside our pride and that at times we do make ourselves vulnerable, and that we do share parts of our lives that we maybe sometimes rather keep covered up or put a better face on. But it's that kind of authentic interaction with one another, that type of authentic relationship, and authentic living, that makes us the body of Christ; otherwise we are Asperger Christians in an Asperger church, doing our own thing even as we rub shoulders or do that as a group. But, rather than being a group of individuals we need to become the body of Christ.

It's before us, are we going to be the body or are we going to pretend to be the body. Are we going to use our gifts in such a way that we build one another up or are we going to simply promote our own agenda. I'm not saying that we are a hard core case of Asperger Christians or an Asperger church, but the challenge is very real that we need to remember that context. That the gifts and the strengths that we were given are not for us alone, but for the building of the body and that how we do that we need to keep in mind how it affects the rest of the body and how we build one another up, because when one part hurts, all parts hurt and when one part is glorified or built up, we are all built up. We need that balance that we gain from one another. Let us serve one another as the body of Christ. Would you pray with me?

Lord, we thank you for your church, the body of Christ. We thank you for our place in it, so help us to be involved with one another's lives in real, authentic, meaningful ways, and not just surface living. but help us plunge, head to toe, into the life of your body, the life of the church, that we might grow in our relationship with you and that others might grow through us. Help us to be your body, the church. Amen.