

JESUS IS NOT ENOUGH: We Need Each Other

Theme: The church is the ministering community of Jesus in which we each have a valuable part to play in concert with everyone else.

Text: I Cor. 12:12 – 21, 27

“Jesus Is Not Enough” is the title I have chosen for today’s message. Have I gotten your attention? Before I am branded as heretic and there is a call for my removal, let me explain the title. When it comes to our salvation, Jesus is more than enough. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, he has done all that is necessary to buy us back and paid the debt of our sin.

But in terms of relationships and community, Jesus Himself says that He is not enough. Jesus is not sufficient to fulfill our relational needs. In Genesis 2 Adam is created prior to Eve. He is in the garden of Eden with God, his one companion prior to the introduction of the stain of sin. Yet the Scripture says, *“It is not good that man should be alone.”* Man is alone with God. Is that not enough? Apparently not. The man’s aloneness is not filled until the woman was created from the man and brought to him. Then he exclaims, *“At last! Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”* Having a relationship with God alone was not sufficient. We were designed to be called into a relationship with God and in the process God completed our need for relationship by creating the church, the body of Christ in which each of us is to have a part.

There are times when a turn of phrase in a pithy way brings home a penetrating insight that a thousand words could never convey. One of our leaders in my former church, who was speaking at an Adult Retreat a couple of years, turned such a phrase. He was saying that we put inordinate pressure on ourselves to be these complete, multi-talented, thoroughly well rounded individuals. Then he said it dawned on him that we were never intended to be paragons of self-sufficiency. He summed up this insight with this phrase. “We don’t have it all together, but together we have it all”. Isn’t that good?

The apostle Paul made this point by choosing the human body as the best Biblical image of the church. *“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.”* (I Cor. 12:12) What two words stand out in this verse? One and many. Unity and diversity. 1. On the one hand, the body is a phenomenal unity: all the parts work together under the coordination of the head. 2. Yet, the human body is also an expression of diversity: each part has its own role, the ear for hearing, the eyes for seeing, etc.

On the surface Paul appears to be using the body as a metaphor or word picture of the church. A metaphor is a symbol or word picture that points to a deeper reality, but the symbol is not the same as the reality. For example, when

Jesus held up the bread at the Passover meal and said, "This is my body broken for you", we Protestants did not believe Jesus was speaking literally. The bread was not in actuality his body, but a symbol to be associated with his broken body. But when it comes to referring to the church as the body of Christ, I believe Paul is intending here more than just a nice word picture. How does Paul conclude v.12, and how does that differ from what we might expect? Let's read it again. *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with the church" (1 Cor. 12:12)* What is wrong with that? Paul doesn't say "so it is with the church", he says. "so it is with Christ." Paul is telling us that the church is nothing less than the living extension of Jesus here on earth. The church's fundamental identity is to be a living organism in whom Jesus dwells. Ray Stedman, former pastor in California and writer of the classic in the early 70's Body Life, writes, "The life of Jesus is still being manifest among people, but now no longer through an individual physical body, limited to one place on earth, but through a complex, corporate body called the church."

Where did Paul get such a radical notion as to associate the church as the people in whom Christ dwelled? I believe Paul understood it from the days of his first encounter with Jesus. Before he was Paul, an apostle, he was Saul, a Pharisee, who expressed his loyalty to Yahweh by persecuting the church. One day Saul had received authority from the Sanhedrin to go arrest Christians in Damascus. As he and his entourage were making their way to the city to Damascus, Saul was stopped in his tracks. Suddenly a light flashed from heaven, and Saul was knocked on his backside. While on the ground, he heard a voice, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul knows he is in the presence of power, so he replies, "Who are you, Lord?" Note the reply, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting?" Now, wait a minute. Saul isn't persecuting Jesus; he is persecuting the disciples of Jesus. Aw, but here is the truth that sunk into Saul's consciousness from the beginning. If you touch Christians, you are touching Christ. There is such a close identification between Jesus and his followers, that to touch them is to touch him. Jesus continues to manifest his life through us.

That is why the missionary Frank Laubach could say, "We are the multiplied hands, His feet, His voice and compassionate heart."

A friend of mine, Jeff Cotter, a pastor at the time, spins a story that playfully illustrates the organic nature of the church. Jeff provided a seatmate on a plane an unforgettable ride. Returning from a job interview wearing jeans, Jeff was not at all looking the part of a pastor. The man next to him was quite a contrast. He was the image of GQ in his Brooks Brothers suit, designer shirt and tie. Quite full of himself, he waxed eloquently to Jeff, his captive audience. His business was women's fitness with plans to establish his salons throughout California. Once that territory was conquered he would expand the empire by

going nationwide. His goal of being a millionaire by age thirty was quite within reach. After dominating the conversation, this man finally turned to Jeff, and said, "And what is it that you do?" looking askance at Jeff's casual attire.

As only Jeff can, he thought he would have a little fun with this man, while making a point about the nature of the church. "It's interesting that we have similar business interests," said Jeff. "You are in the body changing business; I'm in the personality changing business. We apply basic theocratic principles to accomplish indigenous personality modification." Not wanting to appear ignorant, Jeff's companion said, "You know, I've heard of that. But do you have an office here in the city?"

"Oh, we have many offices. We have offices up and down the state. In fact, we're national; we have offices in every state including Alaska and Hawaii." The listener was searching his mind for the Wall Street listing of this company. Jeff continued, "As a matter of fact, we've gone international. And Management has a plan to put at least one office in every country in the world in this business era." Jeff paused for dramatic effect. "Do you have that in your business plan?"

"Well, no, not yet." Admitted the young man. "You mentioned management. How do they make it work?"

"It's a family concern", said Jeff. "There's a Father and a Son...they run everything."

"They must have a lot of capital," Mr. MBA said longingly.

"You mean money? Yes, I suppose so. No one knows exactly how much it takes, but we never worry because there's never a shortage. The Boss always seems to have enough. He's a very creative guy...And the money is, well, just there. In fact, those in the organization have a saying about our Boss, "He owns the cattle on a thousand hills."

"Oh, he's into ranching too."

"No, it's just a saying we use to indicate his wealth."

Now totally hooked the man said to Jeff, "What about with you?"

"The employees? They're something to see. They have a 'Spirit' that pervades the organization. It works like this: The Father and Son love each other so much that their love filters down through the organization so that we all find ourselves loving one another too. I know this sounds old fashioned in a world

like ours, but I have people in the organization that are willing to die for me. Do you have that in your business?"

"What about the benefits?" This guy was ready to abandon his measly plan and hire on. "They're substantial. I have complete life insurance, fire insurance—all the basics. You might not believe this, but it's true: I have holdings in a mansion that is being built right now for my retirement."

"You know one thing bothers me. I've read journals, and if your business is all that you say it is, why haven't I heard about it before now?"

"That's a good question," Jeff said, "After all, we have a 2000 year old tradition...it is called the church."

This is the body in whom Christ dwells. Through His guidance the church has and is penetrating every part of globe all under the management of the Triune God; we have an employee training manual that has been translated into thousands of languages. We gather in cathedrals, modest buildings, houses, basements...and Jesus is present to all.

Operational Running of the Church

Paul means us to understand our identity as a people indwelt by Christ in operational terms. It is not just a nice thought that gives us goose bumps to believe that Jesus is here, moving among us. It is not just some mystical moment of the immediacy of Christ's presence penetrating our consciousness. Paul is very practical. The intent of his teaching in I Corinthians 12 is quite functional and day to day. Christ expresses himself through us as the body of Christ and intends to run his church. Jesus intends to run the church, because all are connected to the head and therefore can turn to the Head to know their assigned part if listening. Paul Stevens writes in his book Liberating the Laity, "There is a direct and living connection between the Head and every member of the body...No church leader in the New Testament is ever called the head of a local body. That title is reserved for Jesus. The head does not tell the hand to tell the foot what to do. The head is directly connected to the foot. Therefore, people find their ministries not being directed by the leaders but by being motivated and equipped by the Head."

When each of us understands our value and place in the body of Christ, and seeks to know from the Head of the body the part we have been assigned to play then, Jesus is given permission to run his church.

As I have come to see it, what Paul speaks about here in this passage in the context of the church is valuing all the parts. We are all needed, because we

are only the body of Christ as we function together. We are designed as incomplete so that I have something to give to you and you have something to give to me. Instead of being these well-rounded, multitalented, thoroughly complete and independent people, God has designed his church in such a way that we all are needed. We were never intended to be paragons of self-sufficiency, as our culture might idealize. Remember, "We don't have it all together, but together we have it all."

If this is all true, why don't we see it as a reality?

Paul says that there are two attitudes that undermine the proper functioning of the body of Christ. When people experience inferiority in comparison other parts of the body and when some feel superior to other parts of the body.

A. Inferiority (I Cor. 12: 15, 16)

First, Paul surfaces the negative attitude of inferiority or a low self esteem as detrimental to a healthy body. To capture this Paul personifies the body parts and gets them to have a conversation with each other. First, the extremities speak, *"If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (I Cor. 12:15, 16)*

Why would the foot and the ear feel like they are not much in comparison to the hand and the eye? My guess is that the Corinthians suffered from the same malady we do in the church. They exalted some gifts as higher than others did. They placed gradations of value on gifts. The church today is in part sick because we have so exalted the pastors and preaching, so that no other gift can match that level of importance. Hear this statement from Martin Luther as the legacy of the importance of the preacher in the body of Christ, "A Christian preacher is a minister of God who is set apart, yea, he is an angel of God, a very bishop sent by God, a savior of many people, a king and a prince in the Kingdom of Christ and among the people of God, a teacher, a light of the world. There is nothing more precious or nobler on earth and in this life than a true, faithful parson or preacher.

Protestant churches have been just as priest ruled as Catholic churches, we just call it by a different name. Under the Roman Catholic Church you have a sacramental priest who presides at Lord's Supper or Mass, in the Protestant Church we have a pastor who preaches, whose gifts are more important than the rest of the body.

How does this express itself? "I am just a layman." This has so worked itself into our psyche that we have developed quite clearly first and second class Christians in the kingdom. First class are those who is full-time Christian service, especially pastors of churches. Then there is the rest of us who do filler roles because the paid professionals can't do it all.

We have an hierarchy of worth. I was speaking at a conference in Montreat, North Carolina. A group of people from another conference where standing out on the patio. I overheard a denominational executive ask one of the attendees, "Are you a pastor?" What was the immediate response, "No, I am just an elder." Inferiority.

As soon as you set up a hierarchy of gifts in the body comparison will set in.

Comparison –We begin to compare our gifts to others and declare ourselves deficient. We begin to play the "if only" game. If only I could be like so and so then I would have significance and value. There is not a person in this room that has not secretly envied the gifts of someone else and thought that we could have worth and value "if only". I just finished co-teaching a class this past Friday. I took a moment yesterday to glance at the course evaluations to see how I came out in the reviews. Since I was team teaching, I was particularly interested in how I was rated alongside my teaching partner. O, how we can allow comparison to creep in and become a tool for self-judgment and allow our worth to be diminished.

Copying the second natural response when there is an hierarchy of gifts, is to try to copy those we admire. Instead of being ourselves we mimic someone else and cease to be the unique creation we were made to be.

Paul says that copying is a sin against our brothers or sisters and a sin against God. It was the Lord who designed you the way you are and you are just the one needed in the body. *"But in fact God arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."* (1 Cor. 12:18) To try to be someone else is to be a pale imitation and to miss seeing the glory of the unique way God has designed you. You are needed as you are.

Paul makes this point with humor. *"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?...If they were all one part, where would the body be?"* (1 Cor. 12: 17, 19) Just imagine a six foot eyeball. What a monstrosity. When we limit the body of Christ to a few parts we have created a monstrosity. For the Biblical message is that all parts are needed. Paul carefully avoids any sense of hierarchy or valuing some gifts over others. To ask which gifts are most important is a

question from the flesh. It comes from our sinful nature. When we build the church around a hierarchy of gifts, we have blasphemed God's design. Inferiority disrupts a healthy body. You are valued just as you are.

B. Superiority (I Cor. 12:21)

If the first de-valuing attitude is inferiority, then the second devaluing attitude is superiority. In verse 21 Paul selects higher parts of the body that look down from above and treat the lower as lesser. Eye over hand and head over feet. *"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' (I Cor. 12:21)* What are you in comparison to me? I am more important than you are. We don't express that attitude overtly. We are much more subtle than that. We have worked the attitude of superiority into a primary American character quality that we call independence and self-reliance.

American individualism, self-reliance and independence has cut the heart out of the community and inter-dependence that are integral to the body of Christ. Robert Bellah and his research team went in search of what is distinctive about the American spirit or character. In their landmark study entitled Habits of the Heart, they state that the defining quality of the America character is "radical freedom from obligation." Americans have a skewed view of freedom. It is not a freedom for, but a freedom from. This is expressed as follows: "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it. And no one is going to tell me otherwise." The self has become the basic unit of society. Not the community, not the family, but the self. The self is autonomous.

Paul Stookey of the folk group Peter, Paul and Mary, does a humorous routine in their concerts where he traces the evolution of our society toward the individual through the magazine titles over the last few decades. He asks, "What was the most popular magazine a generation ago?" The crowd, being mostly baby boomers, shouts back knowingly "Life!" Stookey spread his arms out wide indicating that Life is as large as the world. He continues, "Then we moved from Life to People." His outstretched hands move closer together. "From People we went to US." Again the distance between his hands narrows. "Then we went from US to SELF" Now the hands are about an inch apart. He concludes, "I am waiting for the next magazine to appear. It will be simply entitled ME. You open it up and it is made up of page after page of aluminum foil reflecting your image back to yourself." Robert Bellah draws the conclusion that individualism at heart of the American identity is hardly the stuff from which to build either lasting relationships or enduring community. When it is all about ME, eventually you can get fairly lonely.

There are attitudes of superiority that work against the sense of belonging and mutual service that is integral to community.

Being integrally involved in the church is not a necessity for Christian living. My wife and I were worshipping at a well know Southern California church a couple of years ago. The teacher of the morning asked the congregational the question. Is it necessary to go to church or be a part of the church to be a Christian? What was the answer? He said "no", it is not necessary. I wanted to stand up and scream; "Yes, it is absolutely necessary". Some people have the smug feeling that they have graduated from organized religion. Spirituality is separate from any corporate connection or regular practices of joining with others in worship or intertwining our lives with fellow believers. Spirituality yes, church no.

Instead of being self-reliant, "I don't need you"; Paul is saying value the gifts of one another. Don't you see that there is no hierarchy of value in the body of Christ, because Christ values all of us equally. Any hint of devaluing our own importance or the importance of others undermines the oneness of the body, and our celebrating diversity.

I have a dream. I am praying in the day when every member of this body will know that they have a valued role based upon the ability to name their spiritual gifts and taking responsibility to use them. This body will reflect the presence of the living Christ when we can affirm this statement by Gordon Cosby. He says, "Christ makes each of us something unlike any other creation fashioned by God—something wonderful, exciting, unique; something specifically needed in the total body of Christ. This uniqueness, this very self that is so hard to describe; this charismatic person is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the primary gift we bring to the body, and without it the body is immeasurably impoverished."

C. Interdependence

There is a godly middle ground between inferiority and superiority, it is called interdependence. If inferiority is dependence, and superiority is independence, the body of Christ is about interdependence. What this means is that you need me and I need you, you are incomplete without me and I am incomplete without you. We don't have it all together, but together we have it all. Paul sums it up in Verse 27. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

Let me ask a couple of questions for you to ponder:

Are you disconnected from the body of Christ?

Are you allowing yourself to be only a spectator in worship?

Would you take a next step? Come to one of our Adult communities on Sunday morning or mid-week to be connected in relationship and get on a pathway of growth as a disciple of Christ.

There is no growth in Christ apart from connection. Unless a part of the body is connected, it dies. But if it is connected we find our worth and value in relationship to each other.