

***One Body, Many Parts
Our Life Together as a Church***

Text: I Corinthians 12:12-27

Dawne Quinn, Minister of Faith Formation

May 22, 2016

Today, we come together to hear Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12. This piece of Paul's letter to the people of Corinth was advice to the early church, a way to help them better understand their relationship with one another, and perhaps how to get along as one. Paul compares a body and all its diverse parts to a church and all its diverse members. He suggests that each body part has a special function to perform and that no one part is more vital than another. The same principle can be applied in church. He implies in his writing, that if we could simply see ourselves as equally important parts of this church family, we would get along –no dissension. Together we are the body of Christ. Sounds doable right? Well let's see...

Five church members stood up to "argue" who does the most important work in the church. I interrupt.

Whoa, wait a second guys, I was just saying this was pretty doable. You're proving me wrong, I thought we had this!

Perhaps, I should have noted that Paul does **not** insist that all members of the community should think alike on every subject, **nor** does he advocate that someone with authority should tell others what to believe. What he does insist on is a unity of **spirit and purpose** that will allow each group to learn from the others.

Let's see, church school, music, lay leadership, ushers, and pastoring- it all seems equally important. Could we have one without the other? Is there something that could be left out? How would this impact who we are as a church? Could outreach say to music, you don't belong here? Could team leaders say to pastors, we've got important leadership roles, you don't belong here? Of course the answer is no.

To grow in our life together as a church it is critical that we honor and respect each other's God given spiritual gifts. Likewise, it is critical that we recognize our own gifts, that we don't get trapped in false modesty, that we don't sell ourselves short, that we recognize fully that we

have something to offer even if we don't know what that something is. We are meant to use these gifts for ministry. Ministering to each other, to our community and out in the world. When we recognize our own gifts, lift up these gifts in each other, we lift up the church.

In April, at our annual meeting, we voted to adopt a new structure. This new structure, or way of being in community with one another to do God's work, is different than our old way. We've done away with committees and have adopted teams. Our teams have leaders and our teams have workgroups. So how do we operate in this new way? We are willing to be one body, but how?

We used to identify our "parts" in the church with names like Deacons, Hospitality, Christian Education Board, Parish Care, buildings and grounds, music ministry and so on. Now we have spirit, outreach, in reach, business, futures, and coordinating. It's very possible that all of this may have you feeling a little like Mr. Potato head, with a need to reassemble your parts back into one body. You may even feel like the foot, "Hey I'm not elegant like hand, embellished with rings, I guess I don't belong to this body." But does that make it so? I challenge you to not doubt the gifts you've been given AND to consider them a vital part of the church body. In Romans, we are told that each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around.

In our daily interactions, we may not realize how important we are to each other, and it's not until we step back or maybe make a big change, that we realize how important we really are to each other. In Robert Fulgham's book, All I Really Need to Know I learned in Kindergarten, he tells a story of his relationship with his barber over the course of many years. He doesn't realize how important they've become to each other until his barber's retirement. To quote, "Without realizing it we fill important places in each other's life, it's that way with a minister and congregants, with the guy at the corner grocery, the mechanic at the local garage, the family doctor, teachers, neighbors and co-workers. Good people who are always there who can be relied upon in small important ways. People who teach us, bless us, encourage us, support us, uplift us in the dailyness of life. We never tell them. I don't know why, but we don't."

And of course, we fill that role ourselves, there are those who depend on us, watch us, learn from us, take from us. And we never know. Don't sell yourself short, you may never have proof of your importance, but you are more important than you think."¹

We've taken a look back, we've celebrated who we are, and we've decided where we want to head. Our body, with all its parts is ready to go. It is early, and we may not have ironed out all the kinks yet, but as a faithful people, grounded in our common purpose, we can be the church, each and every one of us called to love our spiritual family.

We are the united body of Christ.

Amen.

© 2016 Dawne Quinn

First Church
12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107

¹ Robert Fulgham, All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.