

"Home: Better Together"
1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Some of you know that we used to live in Bend, Oregon prior to moving to Batavia. So we still keep up with news from there. Recently a funny story from Bend caught my attention and the attention of many in our country: The Googly-Eyed Bandit! In December of 2024, googly eyes started appearing on art structures in Bend.



Finally in January of this year, the bandit came forward: <https://youtu.be/qMih7xgpTtI>.

What a guy! Even though one might have thought that his day job was the most important part of his contribution to society. It became clear that he brought joy to his community just by doing something silly.

This story made me think of how each of us has the capacity to make a difference in the world. Our lives matter, not just when we produce, but also when we care, share, or just simply bring joy to someone else. It is hard to remember that every life matters and can make a difference in the world. Everyone is needed and we are better together when we know that we are needed and can contribute, each in our own unique ways.

The Apostle Paul taught the churches he established or supported to focus on the value of each person in their church communities. He left us the beautiful metaphor of the different parts of the human body having different functions and how our uniqueness contributes to the world. Let's listen to 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²² **On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,** ²³ **and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;** ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Each member is indispensable, especially those who may feel weaker. What great wisdom! Consider this in comparison to how our culture of production and fame seems to give us the message that those who produce more are more valuable. The culture of the church in Corinth had a similar problem.

The Apostle Paul knew about the social pressures the followers of Jesus in Corinth were experiencing. He tried to address these challenges to show them Christ's way of responding. External pressure came from the values of the Roman Empire and its ways of dominance and competition. Paul was writing to a community that was deeply

influenced by the economic and cultural success of Rome. In 146 BCE, the Romans brutally destroyed the city killing all of its men and enslaving its women and children. About 100 years later Caesar established a colony in the same location and sent to it army veterans, freed slaves, and a lot of the urban poor from the city of Rome. As a result, the people who moved there were eager to compete with the glory of Rome. They wanted a city that would rival the grandeur of Rome. Competition became their ideal! They became a society that valued material wealth over relationships and saw the oppressive values of the Empire as the norm for daily life and their economic and political systems. Yet, by the grace of God, the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ took hold in that city and a community of believers was formed. They struggled over time between the sway of their cultural values and the call of Christ on their lives to follow the values of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

The way the social and cultural pressures manifested themselves in the life of the church in Corinth was through the divisions they had internally. They had factions of different leaders. There were those who had their allegiance to Paul; those who had their allegiance to Apollos; those who followed Peter and those who followed Christ. Each group believed themselves to be better than the other groups. And the central debate was around the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. They had tests of who was right and who was wrong based on the spiritual gifts of each group. That is why Paul felt it was important to write a letter to the Corinthians to help them return to their main focus and mission. Paul was trying to help the Corinthians to see their unity and the value of each of their members. Each one was needed.

The expression "the common body" was part of the Roman understanding of society and many speeches from that time and culture reveal to us that this image of the body was something the Romans used to say that the lower parts of the body needed to heed the more important parts of the body for the harmony of the whole body. Peace was to be accomplished when the weaker parts of the body kept the order of things and accepted their place in the hierarchy of society and its system of patronage. Paul takes that concept and reminds the Corinthians of the vision of Christ for cooperation and for the low to be lifted up.

The words of Paul resonate with and challenge us today, especially when it comes to making sure to recognize and value the contributions of each person. When we look especially at ourselves when we have disabilities and limitations, we may consider ourselves as less needed or less important to the whole body. We need to encourage each other to know that our contributions are needed. Each person has a unique way of sharing the love of God in the world. The image of the different parts of the body reminds us that we need each other. We are in this life together and we are stronger together. Sometimes our measurements of who is valuable to society and who is able to contribute blind us to the deep truth of life that everyone's contributions are needed no matter how small.

Consider the many gifts people share with us that we so often overlook or take for granted! Also consider the many ways each person can contribute, just by being willing

or invited to do so. I want to invite you to take a few moments and reflect on the first time someone invited you to help with something and how it felt to be needed.

How might we offer those same opportunities to others? How do we recognize the gifts and potential in others and let them know that they are needed? What does this look like for someone who lives with disabilities and may not see themselves as having something to offer?

Here is a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. about how all of us can serve and thus all of us can be great: <https://youtu.be/RaMSxMpF9to>.

“If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness. By giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.” Amen.