

Grace Lutheran Church, Hatfield, PA
Third Sunday after Epiphany, January 23, 2022
“Indispensable” (1 Corinthians 12)
Pastor Nancy M. Raabe

Today the Greek city of Corinth has about the same population as Lansdale. But in the first century it was a bustling metropolis that towered over the region as the Las Vegas of its time, the original Sin City. Its strategic location on an isthmus between the Aegean and Ionian Seas meant that traffic passed through from all across the Mediterranean. Sometimes the ships were even pulled across the land to the other side where they would sail on. This great confluence of cultures brought with it a dizzying variety of religious beliefs, or in many cases, no beliefs at all other than “eat, drink and be merry.” A new Greek word even sprang into usage, *korinthiazomai*, which meant “to live immorally like a Corinthian.”

Paul’s attempt to establish a church there met with no end of difficulty. The Christian teachings he introduced went against the grain of everything the Corinthians were accustomed to. Even Paul’s own disciples began to fall prey to these influences. This is why 1 Corinthians reads like a FAQ for Christian believers, a heroic effort to set them back on the right track.

In today’s reading Paul is addressing the Corinthian tendency toward radical individualism at the expense of interconnected interdependence. In other words, the temptation to lift oneself up while putting others down. In verse 21, he imagines a scenario in which certain body parts claim they have no need of the others. But I want to share a little skit that explores this from a different perspective: What is the impact of individualism, arrogance and boasting on the other members?

Narrator: “Now the body is not made up of one part, but of many parts. 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 a part of the body.

Foot: “Oh yes, it would! I mean, I can go places, give senior citizens rides to church, and drive for Meals on Wheels. But I can’t give a lot of money like a hand could, or cook the best dish at the potluck like a hand could. Maybe I’m just not needed around here!”

Narrator: “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 a part of the body.

Ear: Oh yeah? I’m not so sure about that. I mean, I can hear and understand a good sermon pretty well, but I can’t seem to see places where anyone needs help like an eye could. What good is it to be able to hear and understand if you can’t see to do anything? Maybe I’m just not needed around here!

Narrator: “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? The eye cannot say to the hand...

Eye: I don’t need you, **hand!** I mean, I’m the most important part around here after all. That’s pretty obvious. Anyone can see that without me, this body’s just stumbling around in the dark. What good are YOU, **hand?**

Narrator: “Nor can the **head** say...

Head: Well, I don’t need any of you! I can think and reason and make all the important decisions without any help at all from you guys. I’m the brains of this outfit. You’re nothing without me.

(At this point, all the parts of the body begin arguing with each other. The Nose moves off to the side and begins to cry.)

Narrator: “On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. God has combined the members of the body... so that there should be no division in the body but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

Ear: Hey, wait a minute. Listen! I hear someone crying.

Eye: Look, It’s the Nose. Poor guy, I wonder what’s wrong.

Head: I’ve got an idea! We could go over there and find out.

Ear: Hey, I like the sound of that idea!

Head: (acting proud) Of course it’s a good idea. I thought of it.

Eye: But how could we get there?

Foot: I could take you, I suppose. (There is general agreement. Everyone lines up behind the Foot, forms a train, and goes over to the Nose.)

Ear: (to Nose) We heard you crying and we’re kind of worried about you. Can we help somehow?

Nose: I don’t know. I get so lonely sometimes. I wish I had some friends. But who wants to be friends with someone whose greatest talent is sniffing out trouble!

Eye: Well, I don’t know about the rest of this crew, but it looks to me that we’ve got some trouble that needs sniffing out. (Everyone looks at the Head. Head hangs his head.)

Head: Well, maybe you’re right.

Foot: You just come with us. We’re not perfect yet, but when we all work together, we can do a lot of good after all.

Narrator: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now YOU are the body of Christ. And each one of YOU is a part of it!”

The takeaway is that those who elevate themselves run the risk of diminishing those around them, and maybe even making them drop out, which weakens and harms the system. The health of the body is promoted when all parts work harmoniously together.

We are blessed that in our community no one elevates themselves above others. As far as I can tell, it is not in this congregation’s DNA to do so. People here think nothing of stepping up in short order to do whatever needs to get done, whether it’s getting a congregational mailing out lickety-split, or identifying why the lights in the sanctuary don’t work, or pooling resources to provide a new roof for a local family, or feeding hungry people across the metro area through one bright idea.

And although none of them want to be singled out, I’m going to do it anyway for the bright idea I just mentioned because it’s a wonderful example of something humble that is greatly strengthening the body.

Lou as you may know is a logistics guy, and Bread Drop is basically a little miracle of logistics in action. Lou came up with the idea in March 2020 when he realized that the community needed a different model to get food to people who were going hungry with pandemic cutbacks and shutdowns. He said, "People needed food and we just had to get creative and figure out a way to do it."

The solution lay in one of life's great comfort foods, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, high in protein with a good shelf life, and instructions to keep it simple: creamy P, plain J, use store-bought white bread, don't cut them in half. People make the sandwiches in their own pandemic bubble and bring them to dropoff locations. Lou then ferries the coolers around the city for others to hand out. He describes his role this way: "I chauffeur peanut butter" -- nearly 200,000 sandwiches have now been distributed using this crisp system. And he hasn't made one yet.

All members of the body are indispensable. No calling is too humble, and there is hardly anything more humble than peanut butter and jelly.

Where does your discipleship lie, if you have not discerned that already? Where does your deep desire meet the world's deep need? Mentioning some of our deep needs, as a Sunday School teacher? Editor of our monthly newsletter? On the Altar Guild? Making phone calls to our homebound members? Participating in an online Bible study, or maybe leading one yourself?

What is the equivalent of Bread Drop for Grace that can help feed our spiritual hunger? Do you have it in you to be a logistics guy for the Holy Spirit? All members of the body are indispensable, and the fuller the functioning of all its parts, the more beautiful, powerful, and harmonious a body of Christ ours will grow to be.

Amen.