

Koinonia & Puzzle-Making

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

¹ Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ 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 stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ 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!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Believe it or not; we are a team. Like the Patriots or the Red Sox, we are a team. Like it or not, we are all connected to one another. As independent as we live outside these walls, when we put our faith in Christ and identify ourselves with Community Covenant Church of Hopkinton, whether formally through membership or informally through regular participation, we become one; we are a team.

When we yield our life to Christ and receive his Spirit, we were given opportunity to experience *koinonia*; to become connected to one another in very real ways, so real in fact that we need one another because we each play an indispensable role in our common mission to love one another and to further God's kingdom through service & love.

John Donne, a 17th century English poet, is often-quoted for his words "No man is an island," but he also penned some words about the Church:

"All that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me, for that child is thereby connected to the head, which is my head, too, and engrafted into the body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me." John Donne

Donne understood and experienced the reality of our *koinonia* connectedness in Christ. Do you? Do we?

The Apostle Paul did, and through the inspiration of God's Spirit described us in a remarkably effective way; saying that together we are one as the human body is one.

We all know what a body is; we've all got one; some are working better than others, but we all have one!! So, you know from very practical experience what a body is like. It's something like a machine, but it's far better than anything we could ever manufacture. We can create super-computers like "Watson" who can beat the greatest winners on Jeopardy. We can manufacture robots capable of precise repetitious actions, but in fact, most machines that we make are only poor imitations of isolated parts of the human body.

Right now, with little awareness and even less effort, our bodies are working in remarkable ways. During this worship hour, your heart will pump 4,320 times. Your lungs will breathe 968 times. Your stomach is still trying to figure out what it was that you ate for breakfast. Your liver and intestines are sorting out the good from the bad. You have over 290,000 brain cells taking my words and making pictures and thoughts and connections in your mind.

Our bodies are amazing things, and the most amazing thing about them is that they work so well together as a unit. We don't even need to think about it for this to occur. Every part is important, and we are reminded of that whenever a part weakens, or totally fails.

Every part relies on the rest to make things work in a healthy way.

That, says the Apostle Paul, is a picture of the church of Jesus Christ, where by the power of God's Holy Spirit you are incorporated into "the Body of Christ" where you will not only discover a sense of belonging (fitting is), but you will soon discover that you are needed for that body to function as God intends. If you seek and find your spiritual gift(s), the unique capacity God gives those who trust Him, you will soon realize that your spiritual gift

is meant to team up with other people/gifts; none of which are sufficient in isolation. Indeed your capacities cover others' inabilities, while their capacities cover your inabilities. And in the end, none of us deserve any more credit for what is accomplished for God; for all that we have and all that we are come from God; individually we are only pieces of a puzzle with interesting curves and cuts designed and assembled by God. The beautiful picture of Christ working in the world through Community Covenant Church of Hopkinton only materializes when all pieces comes together, connecting in the right places; doing what God empowers them to do.

This is the model picture of the Church; the goal toward which we strive; everything fitting well together and displaying God's glory. But that's not always the case. And that is what I want to talk about this morning.

Back in June we spent some Sunday's talking about Spiritual gifts. In fact, many of you completed and turned back a bulletin insert through which you to self-identify your spiritual gifts. (I've squeezed that on the back of this morning's scripture & message insert.) The results of that survey were then compiled into a list for church leaders to use. And while I know that that list has helped connect church needs with gifted people; and it will continue to do so, I'm convinced that as a Body of Christ we continue to function far from our potential.

We are alive, that's for sure. God is doing some wonderful things through us in the community and the world. Your love for one another is notable. Your notes and conversations reveal some serious spiritual growth; an encouragement for any pastor!

But at times, don't you sense, that together we are simply surviving, and not thriving? Like our Patriot's football team; rocked by personnel

losses and injury, we're hoping to only winning the next game, and not sincerely believing we can be Super Bowl champions.

In many churches, conflict and power-struggles eat up collective energy and detract from healthy body-function; perhaps like a cancer does in the human body. And while there are treatments for those kinds of church struggles, I don't see that as our issue.

I also don't think our "issue" is a lack of knowledge. For while there will always be people learning about Spiritual gifts; like those to whom Paul in writing in Corinth:

*¹ Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters,
I do not want you to be uninformed.*

For I know that I've preached, and most of you have heard, about Spiritual Gifts dozens of times.

- ❖ You know that God gives, and each Christians receives, one or more special capacities for work in and through the church called "Spiritual Gifts".
- ❖ You know that Spiritual Gifts make you a servant of God's work here on earth, even as others will serve you and your family with their gifts.
- ❖ You know that God has purpose for you in the church through your gifts until the day he takes your home; there is no retirement in God's family.
- ❖ You know that there are a variety of Spiritual gifts within the church, and that God distributes them in number as well as in volume (intensity/concentration).

- ❖ You know, as Paul write in 1 Corinthians 12, that rather than getting hung up on what gifts others have and their role in the church, you are primarily responsible for your gift and your function,
- ❖ For you know that each person is equally loved by God and equally needed for the Body of Christ to function at its greatest potential.

As I look at Community Covenant Church of Hopkinton I neither see a Body of Christ needing healing from conflict, nor do I see uninformed Christians. What I think I see are brothers and sisters in the Lord content to survive, and not to thrive as a fully-functioning Body of Christ in our world.

And that is what I address today.

So today I have some application questions for you:

How are you serving God right now, in and through Community Covenant Church of Hopkinton?

I ask this question because I sincerely think that many American Christians today view the Church as an institution created to serve them, rather than as a living Body raised by God to love and serve others in His name.

Many Christians ask “What can this or that church do for me?” rather than, “How can I love and serve God and others through this or that Church?”

That second group of people would have an answer to the question “How are you serving God now?” because it defines their God-given purpose within the Church:

- ❖ I have been gifted by God to teach his Word,
- ❖ I have been gifted by God to generously support the mission of the church.
- ❖ I've been gifted by God to pray for others
- ❖ I've been gifted by God to offer His healing and compassion by visiting the sick and shut-in.
- ❖ I've been gifted by God to show hospitality and welcome new people into the Church.
- ❖ I've been gifted with musical ability and find joy in leading our congregation in praise & worship.

What are you doing right now? What God-designed purpose are you fulfilling in this Body? Do you realize that you and your gifts are just as important to our health as me and my gifts, or anyone else and their gifts?

Having grown up in the Church I experienced many seasons when my church was between pastors. During those times churches tended to enter a “survival mode” where they seemed to hold their breath when a resignation was tendered until a new pastor arrives.

And yet, don't we see that a church body is equally crippled when other gifts in the body go missing? When teaching or leadership, discernment or prayer, wisdom or hospitality are not exercised because “we don't have the time” or “we lack faith” in God's equipping and empowering, or we simply don't understand the importance of those gifts in us. Here too, the church “holds its breath”, possibly surviving but certainly not thriving when those gifts go missing.

Today ask yourself “How am I serving God right now in and through Community Covenant Church of Hopkinton?” For us to get beyond a “survival” mentality we all need to be able to answer that question, because God has equipped all of us with essential tasks for the health of this Body.

And so we also need to ask a second question:

How can you encourage others to use their gifts?

I fully acknowledge that it is not enough for me to present these questions in a sermon. As a Body of Christ we need one another and one another’s gifts, as well as one another’s encouragement to be fully functioning; for us to become a healthy body of Christ. In essence, we are all be limited by our weakest link.

Did you hear what Paul wrote about the “weaker” or “less honorable” parts of the body;

²² *...those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*
²³ *and the parts that we think are less honorable*
we treat with special honor.

Koinonia plays a significant role as we seek to help one another become all that God has redeemed them to be. When the Spirit of God in us reaches out to other believers, to encourage God’s gifts in them, not only do we help those sisters or brothers in Christ but we improve life to our common Body. When we put aside human opinions and solutions and allow God’s Spirit to flow through us to build up the Body, there will develop coordination as the Spirit unites us with Christ our head.

The story is told of Charles V who, 400 years ago, was King of Spain & the Holy Roman Emperor. After turning over reins of power to his son, Phillip II, and brother, Ferdinand I, Charles V set himself to accomplish many unfinished projects. One of them was to coordinate six clocks in his Spanish palace so that they would precisely chime together on the hour. It never happened.

And that's because, in those days, each clock was independent of the others; each clock had its own set of weights and pulleys, regulating itself by its own wheels and gears. So no matter how much Charles adjusted each clock, they would never chime exactly together. They ran independently of one another in their separate "worlds".

But today you can actually have all of the clocks in a single building showing exactly the same time. Charles V would have loved it and appreciate how clocks can be governed now by having the same frequency of electricity, and a common coordinating official time signal—Greenwich Mean Time.

When we operate in the same Spirit of Christ, we have a common head that makes us one; coordinating us in purpose and function.

So through the unifying power of Koinonia

- we look not only for our gifts, but we help others to find theirs;
- we remind one another of the equal value and importance of our differing gifts, and
- we encourage one another to find the time to use those gifts,

because in doing so we became healthier, stronger and more productive; so that as one we accomplish the work of Christ.

In simple language, what I am inviting us to do together with God's Spirit guiding the way, is **to build a puzzle.**

- **To first recognize the picture.**

Won't most people look at the puzzle picture before starting? Our picture is a healthy Body of Christ, loving and caring for one another, while loving and redeeming the world.

- Secondly, **to recognize that all the pieces in the puzzle fit into the finished picture.**

How often does a puzzle have two of the exact same pieces, so that one need not be used? They don't come that way from puzzle companies and they don't come that way from God. Every piece belongs. Every piece is needed. Every piece needs placement.

And finally

- **Recognize that sometimes a piece may not appear at first to fit, but when tried it actually does.**

Recognize the biblical truth that God is more glorified when he works through those labeled by the world as "broken" or "worn out" or "damaged" or "too old" or "too young". Remember that the Church is the place where the "God of second-chances" not only forgives our sins but redeems us (restores value to us) and then enlists us to play a vital role in His Kingdom work. We are all pieces that fit into God's puzzle!

And a final application question: **Will you join me in puzzle-making?** Will we be a church that thrives and not just survives?

Thriving depends on the Body working together, every part of it, with the strength God will give. It depends on us drawing closer to one another through the Holy Spirit's gift of *koinonia*, and becoming a united Body with Christ as our head.

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