

Sunday, July 13th, 2008
The 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Corinthians 12:12-31, Luke 10:1-20
All by Ourselves?

One of the comments that I repeatedly hear is that it is possible to be a Christian and not a part of the life of a church. I hear this from a number of sources, including my younger brother, and some of the folks who have been on the rolls of the various congregations that I have been involved with over the years. Mainly, I get this line from people who don't want to get up on Sunday morning. And I get this comment and an argument from folks who think I have rather vested interest in keeping Christians in churches – I do, but that's more a result of what I believe than my need for a paycheck. Not to be overly cynical, but I also usually get this line from folks who have never been a part of a **GOOD** church. I don't mean folks who have never been a part of Presbyterian church, or folks who have never been involved in a church that theologically agrees with me (as a side note I've never found a church that agreed with me 100% theologically), or a church that happens to be close to my house.

What I really mean by a good church is simple – a church that gets what it means to be the people of God together. Sure, there is some theology to go with this, but really, it centers about how we live together. If you have gone through a tough time, which I'm not going to define for you, but you all know what I mean, you were either supported or not supported by your church family. Now, I intentionally listed that some of you may not have been supported. Because some of you have had that experience - I have, at various times. And that brings me back around – can we be Christians all by ourselves?

As I must do, I turn to Scripture for the answer. For instance, after reading the passage from the first letter to the church at Corinth, we start to get the answer. But before we even turn to the passage, turn to the letter – it is written to the church at Corinth, to the body of believers who gather together in the city of Corinth. That alone should give you an idea of the opinion of Paul on the matter and the opinion of the early church based on its inclusion of letters to churches in the canon of Christian Scriptures. To be fair, there are some letters to individuals as well, at least individuals based on the title of the letters.

This is the famous, perhaps over read passage about the body parts. Now, even the densest individual gets this passage. It is a basic, understandable metaphor. We all understand that we would not be who we are if we had 4 ears and no eyes, and that we would miss part of our interaction with the world as well as with one another. At the same time, Paul perhaps did not conceive of the world post-Chernobyl. We know, post-Chernobyl, that to appear to be missing or to have extra parts of the body also often removes us from the realm of humanity in the eyes of others. I've done it, and I'm betting you've done it – averted your eyes, looked away from, or avoided the encounter with the people who evidence such “wounds”. Those “wounds” can be from birth or accumulated over a

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lifetime – to not be “normal” can quite quickly place one outside of the community.

What this adds to our understanding is that the community of Christ, the body that Paul describes is an ideal. Our bodies – yes, yours and mine – are usually less than ideal, whether we’re talking about physical bodies or spiritual bodies. And, like our bodies, what we should take from Paul is that regardless of how much we like our bodies, the parts that work, the parts that don’t work, the parts that look good and the parts we look away from, we are stuck with this body. Yes, even THIS body – the body that is Cottonwood. But we all make up that body and serve the different purposes of the different parts of the body.

Likewise, it takes a certain amount of people to do God’s work here – but what about over there? Jesus was incredibly aware of the fact that word of the good news needed to spread, and spread faster than just organic word of mouth would carry that news. And so Jesus’ answer is to send out messengers to go forth and heal, cast out demons and preach and teach. But Jesus doesn’t send them out in the most efficient manner – which would have been 70 on their lonesomes – he sends them out in pairs.

So why would he do this? Could it be because we need to do this together? We gather to worship, and we disperse to serve – but we don’t always go alone. We gather because there are days when I cannot pray. I’m too wrung out, too exhausted, too frustrated, too hurting, too mad or too tired. And yet, I can come here, and one of you, and it only takes one can pray. And you can pray for me, you can put words to my silence, to my whatever it is I am feeling, and you can talk with God for me, about me, and in spite of me. And I believe the same is true for you.

And ultimately, this is why you can’t be a Christian and not go to church. Ultimately our faith is that we don’t make it on our own, but we make it in the company of a great cloud of witnesses, in the company of the saints, in the company of the sinners, in the company of one another, that we may do the work of God together. Go out – together – come back – together.