

2022 01 23 – Many Members, One Body

I Corinthians 12:12-31a (The Inclusive Bible)

As most of you know, I have an identical twin sister. Her name is Colette.

Colette and I did a lot of travelling together in our twenties and we have even taken a few overseas trips in later years. Travelling with my twin sister is easy. We like doing the same things. We both have inquisitive minds and enjoy going to museums and learning the history of the places that we visit. . Even the rhythm of our day is similar. We tend to get hungry at the same time and, when travelling, like to go to bed early and get up with the sun. Colette really is a lot like me. I never realized just how easy she is to travel with until I went on a trip with someone else.

I know that most of you don't have a twin, but many of you do know what it's like to spend time with people who are similar: people of the same age, people with a comparable education, people who like the same sports, people who believe the same things. It's good sometimes to be around similar people. It's fun to hang out with people who understand us and who can relate to what's happening in our lives. It's normal to spend time with people who enjoy the same activities that we do. Some might even argue that we all belong to the same congregation because we have some things in common.

But what if the people around us are different. What if we find ourselves in a particular group with differing backgrounds, differing economic circumstances, differing levels of education, differing views, differing needs. What if those

differences start to cause friction, unrest and even division within your group?

What would you do?

This morning Amy read part of a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the early church in a city called Corinth. It's obvious from his letter that this particular congregation was having some issues. The members were starting to recognize their differences: some people had more food to offer to the communal table; some were better dressed than others; some were better at leading worship; and still others had the gift of healing. There was a hierarchy forming within the group. A few of the members were starting to feel left out, like they were being pushed to the margins of their church.

Paul, when he heard about the issues at the church in Corinth, decided to write a letter in response. The section that Amy read this morning begins with the words, "The body is one, even though it has many parts; all the parts—many though they are—comprise a single body. And so it is with Christ." Paul goes on to poetically describe the different parts of the human body and how each has its own reason for being, its own important part to play. He says, "If all the parts were alike, where would the body be?"

It's fun having a twin. She makes for a great travel companion. But I have to admit, if I were putting together a task group, if I were looking for people to help me complete a particular project, I probably wouldn't ask Colette to join me. You see, most of the gifts, the skills that she could offer to the group, already exist within me. If I were putting together a task group, then I would look for people

who could offer a variety of talents: imagination, organization, leadership, determination and the specific skills needed to get the job done. I would be looking for a diverse group of people with many different stories and gifts to bring. Because no matter how talented an individual may be, there's no way that one person (or one set of identical twins) has every gift or skill that is needed in an organization.

In his letter, Paul lists some of the gifts that are required for ministry. He talks about apostles, prophets, healers, miracle workers and even those who can speak in tongues, but I would challenge us to create our own list. I would challenge you to think about the congregation that is gathered here in this space, and the members that are not here and think about all the gifts that are represented in our church. If you can, as you think of them, type them into the chat. In your experience, what gifts are important for the ministry of this church and what gifts are already being offered by this congregation? What gifts do you bring? Think about the various committees and working groups that you have been a part of. What gifts & skills were represented there? *(wait for people to start typing... some examples: humour, determination, speaking, drama, music, singing, maintenance, pastoral care, facilitation, passion for justice, community-building, writing, finance, typing, spreadsheets, etc)*

What a wonderful list! I think the most important thing to note is that no gift is more important than any other. As Paul pointed out, "And even those members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable... if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it: if one member is honored, all the members

share its joy.” Some members of our congregation have the gift of making us laugh, others challenge us (just by who they are), still others offer their creativity in ways beyond our own imaginations. No matter what role a member takes, no matter what gift is being offered, all are needed, all are important, all are to be honored and valued equally.

Yes, it can be challenging to work with people who are different than we are; but the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. When we are struggling with our differences, that’s when we need to make a list of all our gifts and remember why each one of us is an important member of the body.

Paul was writing about the body of Christ, about the church and I believe that this metaphor goes way beyond any single congregation or even denomination. One of the most challenging groups that I have joined is the Swift Current and Area Ministerial Association. As a group, we have many differences. We differ in our theology, our liturgy and sometimes even our understanding of the ministry of the church. But, it is still true that we are all members of the same body. That we are loved and cherished by the same God and that there is strength in our diversity. This is especially important to remember on this particular Sunday, in midst of this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

In fact, I believe that the “one body” goes beyond the Christian church. I believe that every human being is a part of one body. Thomas Merton, a modern-day mystic, once wrote:

My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one. But we imagine we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be, is what we are.

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And I would add, what we are is beloved children of God. This is what connects us to every human being on this earth. When we remember our inherent connectedness to God, and to one another, then curiosity and empathy can flourish. When we remember that we are already one, then it is possible to accept our differences. When we remember what we already are, then we are able to have the hard conversations (you know... the ones about religion and politics) while still affirming one another, listening to one another and empathizing with one another.

Yes, it's easy to hang around with people who are just like us—especially an identical twin—but we are called to live in God's world, a world full of diversity, a world full of gifts, a world full of challenge. May we learn to love and appreciate difference. May we learn to love and appreciate all of God's creation. May it be so. Amen.