

TOGETHER WE CAN  
1. "Our Greatest Need"  
I Corinthians 12:14-27  
October 11, 2015  
W. Glenn Doak, Preaching

We are beginning a new sermon series today gathered around the Stewardship theme for this fall, "Together We Can." Back in June the Stewardship Committee kicked around some ideas as to what should guide the committee and congregation this fall as we thought about our commitments of time, talent and treasure for 2016. We had several good catch phrases on the table but then one in the group spoke up and said, "Aren't we really saying, "Together We Can do lots of things around this church." We stopped our individual thoughts and looked up and said almost in unison, "That's it!"

"Together We Can" do lots of things. Paul was more than hinting at that in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians where he is using the metaphor of the human body and how the human body works together with all of its individual parts so that we have a functioning me or you. Paul has some playful charm in this passage making it one of the more memorable of his teachings. Yet underneath the amusing imagery of talking feet and self-deprecating ears is the profound statement of unity that is the essence of the church: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (v.27)

In our series we will move from today's sermon on "Our Greatest Need" to next week when we ask the question, "Who Wants to Be First" and on October 25, "Now a Word about the Collection." Two of those sermons come from Paul's teaching about practices in the local church in Corinth.

Today "Together We Can" find our greatest need both individually and collectively and work on a vision to bring that need to fulfillment. I tease people sometimes during the week with my sermon title/topics. After all if I am working on these themes all week you might as well be working on it with me, right? So I ask people, "What do you think is humanities greatest need? One person said, "You just want one, Rev?" We have lots of them, don't we? Some say, "To be loved!" Another said, "To feel the hand of human kindness on my shoulder. Feeling someone reaching out to me is what I need." Others said, "To do something for someone else."

Now, I did say at the beginning of this sermon that this is a stewardship sermon and so some said are you suggesting that our deepest need is to give more money? I have told you before about the radio evangelist back in Pittsburgh, Sister Ann and Brother Dan who had a permanent revival tent set up down by the Allegheny River and on Sunday right at noon they would come on the radio and say, "Come on down to our revival tent we will meet your needs. And if you can't come just put your \$10 bill in an envelope and write your name and need on it and we will pray for you and if it is a bigger need put it on a \$50 bill." That is pretty straightforward and direct. They also would say, "You should give your money where you get your help, IF you get helped by the church, pay the money there. When you go grocery shopping and get the meat and

potatoes and bread at Publix you don't go over to Kroger and pay the cashier do you? Of course not! You pay the bill where you get the good." So Sister Ann and Brother Dan tell you to pay them for what you get.

But our text this morning from 1 Corinthians is not about money is it? It is about the church and the body of Christ. So, what is our biggest need, anyway? Unity seems to be the theme from St. Paul. He is trying to convince a troubled church in Corinth that the members really do need each other. It seems some have inflated ideas of their own importance. Someone has popped up and said, "I have THE idea that we need to move forward, and like the eyes of the body, I can see where I am going, and I don't need anyone else." Or, another has said, "I like to get things done and like the legs of the body, I can move fast and do them." IF only the person with the vision and the person who can get things done could only work together! One had the vision but not the means and the other had the means but not the vision.

Think what life would be like on earth if hydrogen and oxygen had not learned the principle of unity; if these two elements had stayed apart? When they merged their little act they produced water: rain, dew in the morning and seas. Wagner's opera Die Walkure is said to be made up of one million notes. Individually it would not sound like much; however when each single note is combined and played in its proper place, you have the creative power of magnificent music.

From a solar system to a symphony putting things together is the essence of creation and the glory of God. We have the need for unity and community.

Our deepest need may involve unity but perhaps the real need is community. But that community has to have a direction. Community in the life of the church begins to blossom when Christ is at the head of the church. When we think of the stewardship season we are now in, think of the sharing of our time and talent and tithes and how Jesus is at the head of our community. Someone was taking me to task one day about something we were doing down here the man said at "your church." I stopped him in mid-sentence and said with a big smile, "Wait a minute, it isn't my church or your church; it is Christ's church, Jesus Christ is the head of this church!" Paul is reminding the church in Corinth of that fact. Both former Jews and Greeks constituted that church. Today the church is made up of many different cultures and races.

Yet the church is more than just diversity. IT provides an authentic unity for a world distraught and fractured, bleeding and wounded. The basis for this community and unity is Christ the Lord.

We all need a vision and Together we can make that a reality. One of the secrets to fulfilling a vision and a need is to share with others who are willing to work toward the same vision. In my opinion a vision that really counts is one that starts with God

Our need for community also brings with it a need to belong. We need to have a place in this earth. We want significance. Belonging is a gift of baptism, the gift of the Spirit. Yet there is a tension here. Some people want to belong without belonging. They are the ones whose obituaries read, Thomas was a lifelong member of "The Cross on the Hill Church"—yet no one at Cross on the Hill can ever remember meeting him, although ninety-seven year old Bob thinks they may

have worked together one afternoon fixing a leak in the basement but he isn't sure, and there is an entry in the "Book of Life" under baptisms in 1923—although nothing after that.

Paul says in our chapter for the morning there is no such thing as belonging without participating. Non-participation would cancel the function of the body. The body does not work when one part checks out for a few years. Belonging is not a one-sided affair. We are given the gift of belonging at baptism, but we are also signing up for the responsibility of functioning as part of the body of Christ. (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4, pg. 281)

Together we can return to God the love that he has showered on us through Christ giver of grace. Together we can—Build a whole new children's Sunday school program because the one we had needed to be renovated. So we asked 5 people to help with the process, to be the leaders, and before long each of them recruited 5 each that made 25 and then each of them recruited 5 more and we had 125 people involved in just a little while. And they discovered that some had the ability to teach and others the ability to greet and pray and do crafts or gather crafts together and set and make policy. Wow! They all worked together because we want our little ones to have the same experience in Christian growth that was available when we were growing up. It's a different time now, children are stimulated by new and different things, and we parents might have different goals for our children—that is one of the reasons we are holding a retreat this weekend and asking a variety of parents and other adults what do you think our children should learn in Sunday school and know by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade?

Together we can—have many people involved for example in the Interfaith Hospital Network when we host homeless families. What if only 1 person showed up? How would we do it? We need something like 50 people involved many people doing a few things and it works wonderfully,

Together we can—become a giving church. Someone told me a long time ago, "What we learn first we learn best." If you learned as a child or at the beginning of your adult life to give away a portion of what you have each week/month/quarter then it becomes as natural as breathing. If that is not part of your routine then it becomes a bother or a nuisance or worse "something I have to do or I will feel guilty." Happy givers are not born they are made, made over years of cheerfully returning to the Lord a portion of what God has blessed us with. Not one of us is responsible for the annual budget or the annual receipts to the body of Christ. That is something that we do collectively. It is a lot easier when all of us participate giving our proportional gifts as the Lord has blessed us.

Together we can—sometimes people ask me how much should we give to the Lord? As the Lord has blessed you, we are asked to return a proportional gift. So, if you receive \$25,000 after taxes for example a 5% gift would be \$1,250, if you received \$50,000 after taxes then 5% would be a commitment of \$2,500. Some people receive \$250,000 by the end of the year in salary/bonuses and well 5% of that would be \$12,500. You see regardless of how much it is together we can make it work. The \$5 a month is in there in equal sight to God the same as the \$1,200 monthly gift. And for those who give more all I can say is thank you in the name of the Lord for the ways you return your blessings to the Lord.

One summer I worked for a man building a new storefront for a business. He was a real carpenter and I was supposedly his helper. We spent a couple weeks nailing up dry wall. The carpenter just had a thumb on his right hand, no fingers. He had been working with his disability for a long time and could move things and nail up dry wall as fast as any person you have ever worked with. He watched as I tried to figure out how to hold the nail with two fingers and miss my fingers when I hammered the nail. “Boy, think how fast I would be if I had fingers like you.”

Community becomes a reality when we learn to use our diversity. When we see how interdependent we are upon each other. Some people are as clumsy in front of a Sunday school class as I was nailing up dry wall. Others have the ability to sit and listen and help formulate policy while others would be driven crazy by just thinking about all that sitting and listening.

The claim of the Christian faith is that in a particular place, in the life of the community of sisters and brothers in Christ there is a way—a way of listening, a way of seeing, a way of acting—which can counter the power of evil in the world, and set us on our feet again.

Together we can—we can find that unity and community. We can because Jesus Christ is pointing us to the way. For “We are” as Paul says, “the body of Christ.”