

CALLED TO WORK TOGETHER

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
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Community Church, Congregational
February 3, 2019

This scripture was always a favorite back in middle school youth group. Our youth leaders would get out a game of Twister and challenge us to keep each other on the mat for as long as possible. This game to illustrate working together as the Body of Christ was always fun and filled with laughter. Even when the project was challenging, and someone stepped on someone's foot during Twister, we'd apologize and move on, usually with a laugh and perhaps a slight grimace from the person whose foot got smashed. Have you ever played that game? It's a game where you spin a dial and have to put a certain hand or foot on a certain colored dot without falling down or knocking someone else down. It turns into a pretty silly scene by the time you have to have one foot on blue another on green and your hands way across the mat on another colored dot, all while your partners are under or around or over you. The only way to win is to know where your hands and feet are, stretch and keep your balance, and successfully work together with the other people in the game. If you start knocking each other down, no one has much fun. That's why our youth leaders made the winning rule, "What's the longest we can *all* stay in this together." When we couldn't figure out how to get our left foot across the mat to the yellow dot, we'd coach each other through it, solving it together. If we all came tumbling down, we'd brush ourselves off with laughter and try again. It seemed so do-able, this building the Body of Christ during a fun Sunday evening with my junior high friends. But the reality of living this scripture in the day to day work of being church and working together doesn't always involve that much laughter and frolicking.

The common goal of succeeding at the project was so crystal clear to us in youth group that we gladly accepted and incorporated each of our gifts and strengths along with our weaknesses and failures in order to work together and make a Twister move succeed so no one fell. When we, who are the church, are crystal clear about our call to grow in love God and neighbor, we too can create a strong, stable Body of Christ, able to stretch and move even into challenging places, *if* we work together toward that common purpose.

The key to our success is the same: to work together to make this church the strongest, most faithful Body of Christ possible, and to accept and incorporate each of our gifts and strengths along with our weaknesses and failures.

Not that it's all that easy to accept and include every part of the body, but that's what it takes to work together to become a healthy Body of Christ. Just like with our human bodies. Some parts require special care, just like some people. Not every part works as well as it should; some parts frustrate us or let us down. My big toe was the culprit this past week, as it often seems to be. I don't know if it's just bigger than it ought to be, or sticks out too far, or I'm just clumsy; but at least once a month, I seem to catch that big toe on the corner of our couch. Last weekend, I was doing some chores, and "Bam!" There goes that big toe right into the foot of the coach. Why is my big toe not more careful? Why does she get in the way? Or why can't she be less sensitive so it wouldn't hurt so much? My big toe is a weak link in my body. But I'm stuck with her. She's part of my body. And the rest of time, I'm pretty darned lucky to have a big toe. After all, that toe helps me keep my balance when I stand and talk with someone. That toe helps me walk straight and true when I'm walking to a friend's house. That toe helps me operate my car when I'm driving to church. So, thank heavens that big toe is a part of my body, even if it does annoy me when I bump into things.

"Called to Work Together" ~ 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a © 2018 Mary Scifres ~ www.maryscifres.com

The church is no different. We have people who annoy us alongside people we love working with. The people who annoy us when they bump into us are still connected to us, a part of what God created this church, this Body of Christ, to be. A Hindu man once complained to his guru about someone in his temple community that he couldn't stand working with, asking why that certain person couldn't just vanish from his life. The guru replied, "Even if you could remove that person from your life completely, another person just like him would immediately appear in his place!"

Perhaps we have lessons to learn, even from the parts of the body that cause us discomfort or frustration. Perhaps my toe is trying to teach me to slow down or become more graceful in my steps. Perhaps when we're bumping up against someone, we can learn to become coordinated or strong in a way we have not been before. Perhaps when someone isn't valuing our gifts, we can learn to stand up for ourselves and recognize our own worth and value in God's church. Perhaps when someone isn't as strong or faithful as we need them to be, we are the ones to help them grow stronger or more faithful.

This year, more than 100 of you have covenanted to be part of this Body of Christ that we call Community Church, Congregational. Guess what? That means you've joined a huge game of Twister. We're going to be moving, stretching, and growing together. Or we're going to be falling together. Paul advises us to work together.

The challenge for the Corinthian church was that they started pushing each other off the mat. They started lifting up some parts of the body and claiming those people were different and somehow better or worse: some were judged more or less worthy because of their particular spiritual gifts; others exalted for their special talents or abundant wealth; others left out for being

poor; and some were determined more or less righteous because they had followed a certain leader. All this judging and exalting and excluding was tearing the Corinthian church apart. People who were helpers and caregivers didn't feel as important as people who were preachers and teachers. People who had more money got invited to dinners that the poorer members missed out on. Some who'd been baptized by Paul thought they were better than others who'd been baptized by Apollos. Paul was sick of all the dissension; he yearned for the Corinthian church to become the strong Body of Christ it was meant to be. "In the *one* Spirit we were all baptized into *one* body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free." It didn't matter if Apollos dunked them in the water or Paul did; for the true baptism is the Spirit's blessing that falls upon us.

That same Spirit calls us to work together to be a blessing for others. The Spirit invites us to be the Body of Christ, to help each other stand strong and stretch where God needs us to stretch, just like playing Twister so the whole team wins. It requires participants who are willing to work together to make this church strong and faithful as we grow in our love of God and neighbor. This is not a game where we push each other down or trip each other up, or judge someone on the blue dot more valuable than someone on the yellow dot, or reject someone with two left feet or neglect someone who has tiny hands. Every person matters, and is meant to build up and strengthen this Body of Christ. Every gift matters, and is needed to build up and strengthen this Body of Christ. Everyone here deserves to be respected and valued, treated with compassion and grace, for the sake of the whole Body of Christ.

The people who help out behind the scenes just as precious and vital as the preacher who brings the message or the moderator who leads Church Council. The people who care for the

sick just as precious and vital as the people who pay the bills. The people who teach the children just as important as the people who teach the adults. The people who have a vision for where God is calling our church to go just as crucial to our health as the people who put their hands and feet to work to make that vision a reality. Every person needed. Every person valuable. Every person called to work together in whatever role we are given to build this Body of Christ into the strongest church possible.

Paul invites us to see ourselves in the church as part of a whole rather than as separate from one another. We are connected together, and together we will either stand or fall. We need each other because each of us brings a unique gift, needed to strengthen and build up this church. This church, this Body of Christ, is here to help us discover, strengthen and employ our unique gifts fully for the glory of God!

So, whether you're a big hand on the blue dot or a little foot on the yellow dot, your place matters and your gifts matter. Together, we *can* build and strengthen this church to serve God and our world every more faithfully.

Let's turn to the Spirit. Talk with God and listen to discover where you fit in this body of Christ, what gifts are uniquely yours, and how you are connected to strengthen and be strengthened by others here.