

## **“I Need You”**

1 Corinthians 12.12-31a

Rev. Michael Stol

Almost 50 years ago Richard Adams wrote the novel **Watership Down**. It tells the story of a dozen rabbits who search for a place to call home.

The rabbits discover a great many things through their travels. But, the most important thing they discover is that they need each other. One of the rabbits is big and strong; another is quick-thinking and imaginative, a third is speedy, a fourth is fiercely loyal, a fifth is a good storyteller. Perhaps the key rabbit is the smallest and clumsiest, but has a sixth sense that anticipates danger.

In the course of their adventures, they find ways of using the gifts of every member of the party. In other words, this group of rabbits lives and moves and thinks as one body, rather than as a dozen separate bodies. There can't be such a thing as an idea or a development that is good for one of the rabbits but not good for all of them.

In our reading from 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses a powerful metaphor to describe our life together in the church. He says that each member of the Church is like an eye or an ear or a hand. The foot can't say to the hand, **“I don't need you,”** nor can the eye say to the rest, **“I'm the whole body.”**

That truth is also evident in other areas of our lives. One of the great things about team sports is that they give the opportunity to join a group that will only succeed if it has a mixture of speed, size, strength, hand-eye coordination, determination, courage and imagination. But the real breakthrough comes when the members of the team realize it's not about any one of them being the star, but about each of them realizing how much they need each other.

The same is broadly true for musicians participating in an orchestra and singers joining a choir. The soprano doesn't say to the alto half way through Messiah, **“I'm sorry, but I don't think we need an alto voice anymore. You can go now.”**

There are certain things we need to know about this living together as the Body of Christ. Because Paul's metaphor of the church as Christ's Body is more powerful than we often think.

As the Body of Christ, we often long to get to the point where we can say **“Well, there you go, we've made it now. There is no more growing to do. No more to do out there or in here.”** We long to pay for the new building, to fill all the pews, to reach out to the community and to the city, or to figure out what sort of music they should be singing. And then they can relax. But, you see, that moment shouldn't ever come. When we become complacent and self-congratulatory, we lose our edge, and we lose

the sense of what it takes to be a community, and to tell the truth.

The Church will **always** remain a pilgrim people. Israel was formed on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land. The disciples were formed on the way from the comfort of Galilee to the Cross in Jerusalem. The Church becomes one body as it is **bound together** on its common journey. It's always a **work in progress**.

Also, the diversity of the Church is our **strength**, not our weakness. The Apostle Paul says there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; varieties of ways of serving God, but the same Lord. Sadly, too often we say to one another, or else we imply **“If you play music that is from one era or another – if it is different from what we are accustomed to, you need to be in a different church. If you have a different understanding of liturgy, or Bible teaching, or preaching, or spiritual gifts, you need to be in a different church.”**

And that's the scandal of much of the contemporary church. We sometimes say the most horrible things about other fellow Christians and other churches. And the internet only makes worse. Because there, judgmental people, using the shield of anonymity, pass on hearsay and half truths about others – a practice that used to be called malicious and self-righteous gossip, but is now simply called blogging. The truth is that – **we need each other!** We **need** each other in order to know God!

Being part of a Church that is one body means taking the time to **listen** to one another. To hear each other out when we have stories to tell, or worries, or hurts, or misgivings or hopes. Being one body means that if the eye is in pain, the **whole body** is in pain, and the hand does whatever it can to make things better. Paul's picture of the Body of Christ isn't about bland tolerance. It's about **shared direction, shared wisdom, and shared pain**. Being one body is probably a lot more painful than going our separate ways. But it's the only way to go!

In our communities today we tend to be separated by age. We have “Adult Communities” now and “Young Single Apartments” and condos which advertise “No pets, no kids” and gated communities, to supposedly keep out the riff-raff. But the Christian church does not have those phrases in its vocabulary. The church by definition has no categories of Christians. No extra adjectives. We are just Christians. Followers of Jesus. We're all together here. All together in Christ.

One last word about how the Body of Christ needs to work together, using the diverse gifts it has been given by the Spirit of Christ. In our churches today, we have a problem with the acceptance of the gifts that we have each been given. And we need to be clear. There is no one – absolutely **no one** – who has not been given a spiritual gift by God. And, it is our responsibility to discover and discern the gift of gifts that God has given us to use for the benefit of the whole Body. And if we are stumped, and truly don't know, we need to ask others in the Church who know us – ask them what our gift is.

Because, my friends, this is what happens when we don't discover and use the gift given to us:

Some, who **have** discovered and used their gifts within the Church, get overworked and exhausted, and end up getting very little time to be spiritually fed – because they are forever working. They are using their gifts, and also trying to do jobs that they may not have the gift for – but do those jobs because no one else is doing them.

And then others, who aren't using their gifts – or don't know what those gifts are – sometimes express resentment towards those who are “doing everything.” **“They are taking over the church,”** they say. Not realizing that those others are only doing those things because no-one else is doing them.

It is your God-given right and responsibility to use the spiritual gift that God has given you. If you don't know what that gift is – find out. And use it! In doing so, you will find your place within the Body of Christ. And it will be a source of great joy.

Listen, when we are making the music of faith – when we put all of our concentration into having one heart that is open to the Spirit of God – then we are truly the Body of Christ, the community of faith that reaches out to each other and to others and glorifies God. Each of us sings with the voice God gave us. And not one member of God's choir is an extra. Each and every one is needed. In fact, to say **“I – or we – don't need you”** is really the same thing as telling Jesus, **“I – or we – don't need you.”**

In our churches, we need to be calling together all of our Christian brothers and sisters, of all kinds, in all ways, and across all barriers – calling us all together under the sole leadership and lordship of Jesus Christ. And we need to grab ahold of all of them – all of us together – and bring them face to face with each other. And we need to hold them there, and make them look at each other eyeball to eyeball, even when they may be uncomfortable and squirmy – hold them there, together, in the presence of God – just long enough until they all finally say to one another, **“I need you.”**

I once read about a minister who had an unusual way of finishing the Sunday service. He used to stand facing the congregation just before the Benediction and bow to them. When asked about this unusual practice, he explained it this way:  
**“Some clergy bow before the altar and some bow before the cross. But I'm told that these people are the body of Christ, so I bow to them.”**

And so, following his example, this morning I bow to you, the Body of Christ, and say: **“I need you.”**

**Amen.**