

The Church, Good, Bad or Indifferent

Isaiah 62: 1-5; I Corinthians 12:1-12

Inez was a member of the first church I served – the church where I was ordained. Inez had never worked a "public job" and lived in the house where she was born with her sister. Inez had grown up in that church and never missed an opportunity to worship God.

Realizing that many in the church did not think they had abilities – much less gifts – I began a spiritual gifts inventory and Bible study on Wednesday at noon. The participants brought their lunch and we studied what the Bible said about individual gifts and assessed what gifts each person possessed. I will never forget Inez's response as we discussed this passage from I Corinthians 12. "I don't have any gifts. I just look after old people till they die!"

And so I challenged her. "Inez do you know how helpful it is to me that you call everyone in this community who is either in the hospital or nursing homes, or for some reason not able to get out of their homes? And when either of them has a need, you let me know so that we can supply that need. Your telephone ministry is more valuable to this church than you can imagine." Inez responded, "I just thought I was a busy body. But I have a telephone ministry?"

Inez's sister died last fall. However, each time I have visited with Inez or re-visited the church, she has assured me that she still has her telephone ministry.

Inez had a hard time realizing what her gifts were. I think most of us have a difficult time acknowledging that God has given us gifts for ministry. Ministry is not simply what the pastor of the church does. God intends the priesthood of all believers...that includes me, and you, and you, and you, and you...each one of us are equipped for the ministry to which God calls us.

He places each of us in this place at this particular time to accomplish God's purposes and provides all the skills or gifts to accomplish that purpose. When we, for whatever reason, do not utilize our gifts to accomplish that which God directs, we thwart God's plan in the world.

In this passage from I Corinthians, Paul uses the Greek word "charismata" repeatedly. That word is translated as "gifts". In our society, "gifts" are viewed as talents, singing, sports, music, artistic endeavors. But that is not what Paul means. The gifts to which Paul refers include any and all abilities that are given by the Holy Spirit and are used to glorify God. That includes the ability to make a phone call, talk to people you know and let others know their needs. To quote John Calvin, "Our seeming altitudes for certain types of ministries, our putative spiritual profundities, and our alleged religious accomplishments, no matter how spectacular, can only be ascribed to the initiative of God." And, because we can take no credit for our spiritual gifts, they cannot be used as rationale for high status in the church. In other words, it is not and cannot be made to be about us. Our whole lives are about God, and how God works through us.

And so it is that today, as we meet in the Fellowship Hall, share a meal and discuss what God wants us to be about as the Body of Christ called First Presbyterian Church here in Thomasville, I ask you to consider these questions:

- What is God calling this ChristBody to do?
- What is our particular ChristBody designed to do well?

In verse 18, Paul's argument to the Corinthian, Christ Body is whatever a particular local Christ Body may look like, there are some serious concerns about how they are growing into the church they were designed to be. "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose" (v. 18). We can't choose the family we were born to or what color our eyes will

be or how tall we will end up ... and apparently we can't choose our spiritual gifts either. The gifts we possess were given us by God. It's God's choice, not ours. And, each of us is given different gifts.

Ask anyone to think of their least favorite part of their body, and most people could quickly name several parts that are gross, or that they don't like. It's too this or not enough that. Ask that same question of you in this congregation – the Body of Christ - and though there should be no appropriate answer, there are those who are quick to name the people who they dislike or do not care for. And consider if we're all one kind of member. Can you imagine if everyone in this church were a preacher? What if everyone in this Body of Christ were prophets? Or, what if we only had people who liked to take out the garbage? Or, what if the only dish anyone in this Body of Christ could make was potato salad? Lord help us if that were the body. As it is, diversity in the body exists because God chose our different parts. It is easy for us to expect everyone to do what we do, the way we do it, and in the manner we think appropriate. After all, no one can do ANYTHING as well as I, right? Marcus Buckingham says in his new book, *The One Thing You Need to Know* (Free Press, 2005): "Find out what you don't like doing and stop doing it! Likewise, decide what you like to do – what gives you great joy – and do it. At the same time, respect those who do the things you choose not to do." We don't need to create diversity, we already have it. We just need to *discover and release it*. This is how God designed the Body to function. We must envision a Body where *distinctions are diminished and each part is viewed as vital*.

The story is told by a mother of her little girl setting the table for dinner. Entertaining herself, the little girl brought the utensils to life. Her mother listened as knives, forks and spoons carried on conversation and wrestled their way onto the table. Suddenly the girl looked over at her mother and declared, "If I had to choose -- I'd be a spoon!" "A spoon," her mother replied, intrigued. "Why would you want to be a spoon? What would be wrong with being a knife or a fork?" "Well," the girl explained, "forks are too grabby -- always stabbing stuff and taking it like it's theirs." "Okay," her mother agreed, "what about being a knife?" "No, knives are scary -- like, they cut things, and you can't really eat with them, just slice stuff up," she responded. "But," the little girl continued, holding a shiny spoon in front of her face, "spoons can scoop up lots of stuff and even pass it around. They're just -- nice and round and smooth and friendly. Yep, I'd rather be a spoon!"

To which her mother replied, "But it takes them all. The Fork is needed to lift the heavy meat to your mouth or to hold onto slippery things. And the knives...they don't have to be scary. They cut off the rough edges or spread on the moist butter, ketchup and mayonnaise. We need them all. But I am glad you would rather be a spoon."

As you entered worship today, you were asked to take one utensil. Whether you are a knife, a fork or a spoon, there are wonderful attributes that are necessary to get the job done. Each one of you are valued – not one more than the other. Amen.