

Our Scripture reading today comes from one of Paul's letters to the church in Corinth. They were not doing well, there was a lot of fighting about how things should be done and who should be doing things and the fact that the church seemed to have become about those issues instead of the work of telling people about the good news of the gospel or caring for the women and orphans and others in need. Those were all difficult things, but the biggest disagreement came around the communion table where some people were eating too much, some people were being shut out, some people were only coming to church in time to share in the meal but not in worship. In other words, the citizens of Corinth were not acting like church, and Paul's letter was an attempt to get them refocused on the things that really mattered.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the

head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

May God Bless to our understanding the Words that we hear today.

Today is the last of the summers You Pick It I'll Preach it sermons and we are actually ending our summer with more of the same scripture that we started with at the beginning of the summer. Remember that the United Church of Christ bases itself off of this scripture with our statement that All May Be One. The hope and the prayer that through our differences we may find our unity in Christ.

I did not grow up in the UCC so

In my Kidhood and adulthood I have heard this scripture used in many ways.

Often it is used a stewardship time to underscore the needs of all of the talents or gifts that people bring to church...that no talent or gift too small or too big and that

all of them are important to have one healthy church. And that's ok, I can buy that...but that doesn't get at what Paul is getting at today.

I have also heard this during recruiting time, I mean, board nomination time when the members of the church are asked to consider their non-monetary gifts that they can share with the church, it is used as a reminder that not everyone is called to teach or sing, or do finances or any number of things but that we are all called to something and we should share that something to make a whole church. I can buy that too...but it still isn't getting at what Paul wants us to hear today. I think that what we need to hear in Paul's gospel today goes much deeper and might be much harder to hear.

Will you pray with me please? May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts and minds, be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

Our reading today is just a small segment of some of the letters that Paul sent back to the church in Corinth, and it's easy to see that the church and its early believers and members are experiencing some growing pains. And even though it is a rough time, and even though everyone does not love each other and get

along Paul still persists in working towards unity. He continues to believe that everything the church is meant to be in the present, and in the future is possible because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, I've said it before and I'll say it again....Paul and I don't always agree on stuff, but we do on this point. I believe that everything the church is meant to be in the present, and in the future is possible because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it always amazes me and frustrates me, much in the same way I think it amazed and frustrated Paul at how quickly, this wonderful vital entity known as the church can turn in on itself and implode.

As Church we love Christmas and Easter don't we, those moments of peace on earth, of the reminder of extreme love and salvation. We bond with the world of believers in extraordinary unity and community and fellowship during the season of Christ's birth and the season of his death and resurrection and it always amazes me as to how quickly we fall apart, and how soon we succumb to the divisions of the world when those holidays are over.

Being a member of the body of Christ means an absolute, out-and-out joining of one with the other. If we exist in division, to see only our difference and not the unity, to demand conformity without celebration of difference, goes against the very heart of being Children of God. I believe that there are many paths to God, we have chosen to find our path to God through the teachings of Jesus Christ. I believe others find their path to God through other ways but if we vilify and malign the Greeks and Jews and slave and free ,we will find ourselves cut off from the very source of our life, our existence, and in a way, our ability to be most fully who we are. How can we deny someone else their calling to God too?

You know, I like to imagine that I live a good spiritual life, that I live in a way that reflects this particular scripture , I feel I am an open and welcoming person both in my personal life and in my life here at church. So it always comes as a bit of a shock when I am hit upside the head in a brilliant display of “Oh no your not!”

Yesterday, Michael and I were in Town Center enjoying the experience of our first Greenbelt Labor Day Festival. As we

made our way around the tables I was a little surprised to have a woman in my face asking me if I wanted to take a quiz to find out if I was going to heaven. I declined. I'm not good at taking tests and what if I failed? She continued to urge me saying "Don't you want to know if you are going to heaven?" I assured her that I had no fears that I believed that I was. "How do you know that?" She asked...Now I know that she wanted me to make a public declaration of faith right then and there, but I wasn't going to give it to her. I was a little put off with the way she kept coming at me. Instead I said. "I am sure that I am" She pounced on the word change. "Was I sure or did I know?" I thought about telling her that I was a minister, but I was afraid that she was going to tell me that women can't be ministers and I had no hope of heaven and was going straight to hell, so instead I just said. "I have no fear of death." And I walked away, shaking my head over "THOSE kind of Christians." (I did go back later and gave her some of our Greenbelt Community Church, United Church of Christ pencils)

I admit, this woman got me bent out of shape ...not so much over the whole heaven or hell issue, but because she thought her

way of believing was obviously superior to the way that I believe when you and I know she's wrong OUR way is the better way right?

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Oh dog gone it. There it is, exactly what Paul is talking about, that reminder that we are all interconnected as a community of faith. I don't agree with this woman, I don't share the same theology, but that does not mean that either one of us is wrong or right. Paul's words today reminds us of the evenhandedness when it comes to how and in what ways God chooses to work in and through our individual calls to faithful living.

Protestant or Catholic or progressive or conservative, Muslim or Jew, Buddhist or Bahia, straight or gay, man or woman...we are one in the Spirit...HA