



20/20 Vision—Open Our Eyes

One Body, Many Parts

Sunday, October 20, 2019

Mark 10.46-52

1 Corinthians 12.12-27

Covenant Presbyterian Church in
Madison, WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

Our series on 2020 vision continues today. We've been reflecting on Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, who thanks to Jesus regains his sight and follows Jesus on the way.

So we've been thinking this month about what it means to open our eyes and follow Jesus on the way, individually, and especially as a church.

Two weeks ago, we opened our eyes to the world, giving thanks for our global mission partners.

Last week, we opened our eyes to Madison, giving thanks for our local mission partners.

Today, my hope is that we open our eyes to ourselves, to this church, to the blessing and challenge of community.

So that leads us to our second reading, from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. He urged this church in conflict to come together and recognize their common purpose and mission.

He uses the image of the body to describe the church. He uses this same image in Romans 12, a well-loved chapter of the Bible. But he uses other imagery in his writing, elsewhere describing the church as a building, a field, and a temple.

It's interesting to note that early in the reading, he addresses those who might think to little of themselves, to affirm that all parts of the body are useful.

Later, he addresses those who think too little of others and too much of themselves. All parts are valuable.

His words call us today to unity in the midst of diversity, while not simply saying we're all the same. He recognizes and celebrates the diversity with the image of the different parts of the human body.

You faithful Presbyterians might recognize from when we ordain people to serve in the church.

Listen for God's word

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.

About 20 years ago Robert Putnam wrote *Bowling Alone* now a classic study of how our society is becoming more isolated, more fragmented, more alone. Sadly our “aloneness” hasn’t gotten better in recent years.

We stay inside more frequently, sometimes because we’re afraid, sometimes because we’d rather be sitting in front of a screen.

We don’t get as involved with groups these days, as we don’t trust institutions like we used to, and we say we just don’t have the time.

With our climate-controlled homes and our electric garage door openers, we don’t know much at all about our neighbors.

This movement towards isolation impacts church, as in general fewer people want to be involved with church, or with any religious community.

The term that has become common in describing religious life today is “spiritual but not religious” as in people who still believe in God in some sense, but don’t want to go to church, or don’t want to be part of organized religion.

I’ll be the first to admit that churches as a whole have done some stupid things.

So there are legitimate issues why some people are unhappy with organized religion, I just don’t think it’s possible to be a Christian in isolation.

In her 2013 book *When “Spiritual But Not Religious” Is Not Enough: Seeking God in Surprising Places, Even the Church*, pastor Lillian Daniel makes a strong and compelling argument for the value of church community. She writes:

Being privately spiritual but not religious just doesn’t interest me. There is nothing challenging about having deep thoughts by oneself. What is interesting is doing this work in community, where other people might call you on stuff, or, heaven forbid, disagree with you. Where life with God gets rich and provocative is when you dig deeply into a tradition that you did not invent all for yourself. (p. 128)

She shares wonderful stories about people finding community in the church and she also writes about what all ministers are familiar with: sitting down on

a plane or a bus, and when our seatmate learns that we are ministers, we often hear about why people don't go to church (or temple or mosque). And quite frequently, the person talks about finding God in nature.

Now all of us probably agree that mountains and oceans and sunsets are beautiful and sometimes deeply spiritual experiences. But if that is the extent of our spiritual life, we're missing something. Lillian Daniel writes about what she'd like to say when sitting next to a chatty person who isn't engaged with organized religion:

Thank you for sharing, spiritual-but-religious-sunset-person. You are now comfortably in the norm for self-centered American culture, right smack in the bland majority of people who find ancient religions dull but find themselves uniquely fascinating. Can I switch seats now and sit next to someone who has been shaped by a mighty cloud of witnesses instead? Can I spend my time talking to someone brave enough to encounter God in a real human community? Because when this flight gets choppy, that's who I want by my side, holding my hand, saying a prayer, and simply putting up with me, just like we try to do in church. (p. 128)

So she's a little snarky but she makes a good point. It's good to be in community—a church community, one body with many parts.

We try to build community here at Covenant. I see glimpses of it on a regular basis.

We have 13 small groups happening this fall, focused on the Lord's Prayer. People are learning and growing together

We had a wonderful women's retreat last weekend, a time of friendship and faith-formation.





We have opportunities for teens to connect, grow in faith, and find purpose.
We give kids the chance to learn and grow and have fun

We are a place where diverse people come together with a shared foundation of faith, where we encourage and support each other on the journey, where we try to find God in community.

Building community in a church doesn't just happen, we all have to work on it, we all have to do our part.

One way to help strengthen our community is just to be present.

While it might just be "another Sunday morning" for you, maybe somebody sitting near you is having a really hard time. Maybe they just lost a job. Maybe they got bad news from the doctor. Maybe they or a loved one just got victimized or assaulted. Maybe they just had a big fight with a family member.

So maybe they desperately need you to be here in worship—to sing, to pray, and to look them in the eye and say peace be with you."

Maybe they really want to have a cup of coffee and chat about the weather or the Badgers or whatever.

We need each other. One body, many parts.

Another way to help strengthen our community is by filling out our Serving Survey, a very short questionnaire, asking you about your skills and interests, so we can help everyone find a place to serve.

Just this past week I had conversations with people about serving on the Finance Committee, with someone else about singing in worship, with someone else about gardening, and with someone else about volunteering with the middle school students.

That was four different people. No one is going to be good at everything. Most people would not get excited about serving on the Finance Committee or spending hours with teenagers. But some do.



We are the church together. One body with many different parts.

And together, as we share our gifts and make use of our talents, we serve the common good. Earlier in chapter 12, Paul proclaims the purpose of the one body with many parts

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

We come together from our isolated lives, to encounter God, and then to be strengthened for daily living. One body, many parts, called together to serve the common good.

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Yesterday, we had a memorial service here for a woman named Lorraine, who died a month shy of her 100th birthday.

She's been a member here for only about 10 years, but she loved this church and she helped me appreciate the value of church community, a place with one body and many parts.

I think about three ways that she valued this community.

She valued passing the peace. She used to sit right here in the front of the sanctuary, and she would just light up when it was time to share God's peace. She befriended many people in that short time, including four youth of the Smith family who came to the service yesterday. The Smiths helped Lorraine celebrate her 99th birthday last year.



Secondly, valued gathering to learn God's word. Before she died, she listed out several Bible verses and hymns which she wanted at her memorial service. Years of regular involvement in worship and Bible study in community nurtured her faith, giving her a firm foundation.

And thirdly, she valued being in a community where we try to do the right things together, where we try to share God's love. As some of you know, Covenant is the church where Rev. Scott Anderson was ordained eight years ago, as the first openly gay pastor in the Presbyterian Church. Scott had been a

part of this community for years, and I've heard from many people how joyful the day was when he was ordained.

Unfortunately, a group of hateful protestors from Westboro Baptist Church was outside on corner, with their anti-gay signs and chants. At some point, 92 year old Lorraine heard about this, and she was upset. She lived a few blocks from the church, so she walked down the street to join the counter protest in support of Scott and God's inclusive love.

Lorraine is one of many people who value this community and who make it stronger.

Friends we are blessed with a great church, and we want to keep it strong and healthy.

My hope is that God will open our eyes to see the blessing of being together in community, of being one body with many parts.

But our purpose isn't to simply be a great church, for people to love this church and say how great we are. Our purpose to love God and to go into the world and do great things, to share God's love however and wherever we can. Amen.