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Sermon title: Same Care for One Another

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The text: 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.

Prayer of Illumination:

We have gathered before your Word, O God, we want to hear with understanding, so give us attentive ears. By the power of your Holy Spirit at work in the word read and proclaimed, make the words of our mouths ,and the meditations of our hearts acceptable to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen

Welcome to the city of Corinth in the 50's C.E. - a city alive and booming.

A city that knew it was important and ingenuity was abounding, from making their own copper to being a central shipping port between two major bodies of water in the known world, Aegean Sea and the Gulf of Corinth to the Ionian Sea. It was a city on the rise, with new buildings and commerce popping up everywhere. One Biblical Scholar noted these citizen's competitive spirit and need to be recognized by the plethora of in-scripted buildings, as he says, "In such a culture a person's sense of worth is based on the recognition by others of one's accomplishments, hence the self-promoting public inscriptions. These cultural factors come into play over and over again in 1 and 2 Corinthians, where boasting, preening, false pride, and the like are topics the apostle addresses repeatedly. Even though they were converted to a new religious orientation, the Corinthian Christians brought with them into the *ekklesia* many of the primary social values gained over a life of living with a particular cultural orientation.[1] "

Life in the Corinth Church - what could have they been arguing about to raise Paul's concern to write this letter?

And so, these 'church' people who may have be reborn and renewed in Christ brought into the church so much of their old way of life and that colored how they saw their life within the *ekklesia* or the church in ways that finally rose to Paul having to say something, anything to get them to stop. Scholars are not in unison to just exactly what shade the argument this particular passage is addressing, could they be arguing about how one gift was of more importance to who they were as a church or were they truly a fractured congregation that needed to be reminded of who they are?

I began to wonder what kind of tenor would that argument look like today?

Maybe a gifts arguments and comparisons were as passionate and grounded in today's world as the pundits and commentators discuss sports -

An important game that comes to mind was the Norte Dame and Ohio State college National Championship game, just last Monday night, as hours and hours of sports people from national

[1] Witterington, Ben III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians.* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI. 1995. P.8.

news sites to individuals with deep love for Norte Dame or Ohio State began to prepare for the game:

Here are some examples before the National Championship predictions, I just casually perused to try to understand what in today's world would raise people to discuss, argue and truly believe, they understand and thus are correct - I came across predictions from a site titled Eleven Warriors dedicated to Ohio State fans we had its fans making statements like:

"George Eisner - Ohio State 31, Notre Dame 13 Oregon has the only offense that's been able to break 20 points against the Silver Bullets this season. This game should stay within a couple scores early. However, I expect the Buckeyes' superior offensive talent to put the game out of reach down the stretch — especially if the Fighting Irish don't dedicate the same type of attention to Jeremiah Smith that Texas did."[2]

And of course, the after game analysis and reviews, from coaches, news reports, fans, on and on, making statements like, this from Ohio State's head coach, Ryan Day -

"That first drive went right down the field. I thought we responded in a big way, never flinched. And I think, again, if you think about the run we've gone on here in the playoffs, a big part of the way we've responded coming off the end of the season, but then even the way the Texas game went and the way we responded early in that first quarter, and then even in the second half, just continued fighting the momentum because Notre Dame was fighting to get it back.[3]"

And since I only quoted Ohio State fans and coach, I, of course, need a few Norte Dame Fighting Irish's quotes to balance this argument out:

"I am so fascinated to sort of see like does Al Golden stick to his guns with sort of this coverage schemes that they show on Monday night or do they sort of try to get ahead of it and give Howard something that he's not expecting and then you kind of get him in a position where he's seeing ghost a little bit. I think it's one of the greatest questions of the game[4]" - Pete Sampson, Irish Illustrated

And Norte Dame's coach after the game, to a question from a report regarding if they played outside their comfort zone,

"Yeah, there were some things on both sides of the ball that we don't normally do, in some communication mistakes, self-inflicted wounds that we haven't been doing, past few weeks, you're always making mistakes but those type of detrimental mistakes when you play a really, really good football team cost you points and I think that's the probably the biggest thing that has struck out to me even, in between series of communication 'hey 'we're good, we got it well,

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[2] Eleven Warriors Website, "Norte Dame Pregame Picks" https://www.elevenwarriors.com/ohio-state-football/2024-25-college-football-playoff/2025/01/153057/notre-dame-pregame-picks-staff-score-predictions-picks-against-the-spread-and# Written 01/15/2025. Accessed 01/21/2025

[3] Buckeye Huddle Website, "Postgame Updates, Interview with Head Coach, Ryan Day" https://buckeyehuddle.com/2025/01/21/postgame-updates-following-ohio-states-34-23-national-title-win-over-notre-dame/ Written 01/21/2025. Accessed 01/23/2025.

[4] Irish Illustrated Insider Youtube Channel: "Its Norte Dame and Ohio State for the National Championship" https://youtu.be/0oOjQNtJedw?feature=shared Posted 01/19/2025. Accessed 01/23/2025

we can't make mistakes' and so falls on my shoulders and as the head coach, we have to prepare and be better prepared for this moment[5]."

Friends, there are few things in life that I am willfully uncurious to understand, or discuss and I will be brutally honest, it is football. So, at any point was I able to follow what these sportscasters, pundits, coaches and after-game analyzers were talking about beyond the deep passion they had that their side was ultimately the better team, it is a miracle.

And please, don't attempt to explain it to me either - was what I see as the gist of Paul's letter to this Corinthian church members that were bogged down their ministry, their worship, their life together in arguments around whose spiritual gift was greater, more important, able to do more, and of course, showed their faith in Jesus as the best. And as Paul refuses to engage that argument, we instead get one of the most enduring and successful analogy of the church as Christ' Body.

Paul reminds the *ekklesia* four interlocking points,

One, that the variety of gifts are not through any one person's work or decision. These gifts are indeed gifts from God. God is the source of all gifts and thus because they are of God, God sees the value of diversity.

A commentator emphasizes, " "three times using different Greek verb each time, the text declares that God arranged it so that all members would not have the same gifts, but that within the unity there would be diversity[6]"

The second, as the diversity of gifts are God's unwarranted gift, they are all needed. Just as sports teams can not all be quarterbacks, coaches, or defensive lines, (ha, I do know something about football) all cannot have the gift of tongues or healing. All cannot be teachers, as the silliness of his argument builds that the body cannot all be eyes. Or ears.

While the third, builds upon those first two, that clearly because there is a diversity and all are needed to be a body, that means that all are of equal worth. In world, like Corinth and of course even today, that is a hard truth for any to accept. How in our world were we spend so much energy, time and of course, money dividing not only gifts but people up into who is worthy, who is not, became particularly clear to me as I sat with over 2,000 Springfield community members at the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Breakfast. A breakfast to honor the legacy of Dr. King and to hear the keynote speaker, Justice Lisa Holder White. In awe of her work as an Illinois judge and our first Black woman Supreme Court judge, she expounded upon the breakfast's theme of "a dream deep rooted in the American Dream" and how she found it in both Dr. Kings life, writings, and enduring hope in face of so much even today would tell us otherwise that the dream is dead.

His legacy endures in the power of all of us to recognize, as he wrote in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an

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[5] WNBS 10TV Youtube Channel, "Notre Dame Postgame Press Conference," https://youtu.be/8QklHFR_dGc?feature=shared Posted 01/20/2025. Accessed 01/23/2035

[6] "Third Sunday after Epiphany" Texts For Preaching, A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV - Year C. Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa, J Clinton McCann and James D. Newsome. Westminster, John Knox Press; Louisville, KY. 1994. P. 117.

inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.[7]"

Dr. King knew too well Paul's enduring analogy of Christ's Body's power in diversity, equality and interconnectedness led to directly to Paul's final point, we must show mutual care for one another, " 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."

This bond of who we are as the body of Christ, is so essential to a church, so basic on even the cellar level, it is organic to the truth of who the church IS - that we are because of each one is a member - and so we are both honoring and rejoicing, suffering and enduring agony of one another because we have experienced such good new, such indescribable joy of new life that being embraced in such love and loved *ekklesia* is better together.

Care for one another, dear Church Amen

[7] The letter was copied by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and mailed to other clergymen throughout the state. One of those recipients was Methodist minister Rev. Joe Higginbotham of Centre, Alabama. In 2006, his wife, Ann, donated the letter to the University of Alabama where the University Library Special Collections digitized the 21-page "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to offer readers a chance to experience its impact. Accessed at <*https://www.alabamaheritage.com/blog/2025/01/17/piece-of-history-mlk-letter-from-birmingham-jail-at-uas-special-collections/*> *Accessed 01/24/2025*