

"IF ONE..."

THE CITY OF CORINTH WAS NOT AN EASY PLACE TO DO MINISTRY. IT WASN'T AN EASY PLACE TO ESTABLISH A CHURCH.

CORINTH WAS A SEAPORT, MAKING IT A CULTURAL MELTINGPOT OF VARIOUS PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEAS.

THE CHURCH IN CORINTH WAS MADE UP OF A VARIETY OF PEOPLE WITH ALL SORTS OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS - EDUCATIONALLY, ETHNICALLY, SOCIALLY, VOCATIONALLY.

PAUL SOUGHT TO BRING UNITY TO SUCH DIVERSITY AND TO DO SO, HE USED THIS GREAT ILLUSTRATION OF THE CHURCH AS A BODY.

CORINTH WAS AN ANCIENT GREEK CITY, SO PAUL USED LANGUAGE THAT WAS FAMILIAR TO THE GREEKS.

THIS WAS A TECHNIQUE THAT HE FREQUENTLY USED.

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS, WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE ATHENIANS HE USED QUOTES FROM THEIR PHILOSOPHERS IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN THEIR ATTENTION.

HE DOES THE SAME THING HERE.

YOU SEE, THIS GREAT ILLUSTRATION ABOUT THE BODY ISN'T ORIGINAL WITH PAUL.

HE BORROWED IT FROM THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS.

FOR EXAMPLE, PLATO SAID, *"IF MY FINGER HAS PAIN, THE BODY WOULD SPEAK UP AND SAY, 'I HAVE PAIN.'"*

SENECA SAID, *"ALL THIS YOU SEE, IN WHICH THINGS DIVINE AND THINGS HUMAN ARE INCLUDED, IS ONE; WE ARE MEMBERS OF A GREAT BODY."*

SO YOU SEE, THIS WASN'T A NEW IDEA PAUL WAS INTRODUCING TO THE CORINTHIANS.

BUT IT WAS ALWAYS A FAVORITE ANALOGY OF HIS.

WHenever he wanted to adequately describe the church of Jesus Christ, the one description he always came back to, was this.

IN ROMANS, EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS AS WELL AS I CORINTHIANS, PAUL MAKES OVER 30 REFERENCES TO THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST.

A PROBLEM WE RUN INTO WITH THIS ANALOGY IS THAT WHEN WE THINK OF OUR OWN BODIES, MOST OF US DON'T THINK OF THEM IN A POSITIVE WAY.

IT'S TOO FAT OR TOO SKINNY, TOO SHORT OR TOO TALL.

IT'S BUMPY OR LUMPY OR JUST PLAIN UGLY.

THAT'S THE WAY MOST OF US FEEL ABOUT OUR OWN BODY AND YET, HERE'S PAUL, COMPARING THE CHURCH TO THE BODY.

LET'S LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT THIS COMPARISON.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER YOUR OWN BODY, EACH PART OF IT HAS SOMETHING IN COMMON & THAT SOMETHING IS YOU!

YOU DON'T HAVE A LEG THAT'S SOMEONE ELSE'S.

EACH INDIVIDUAL PART OF YOUR BODY HAS "YOU" IN COMMON.

YOU ARE THE COMMON DENOMINATOR THAT TIES EVERYTHING TOGETHER.

IN THE SAME WAY, THE CHURCH HAS A COMMON FOCAL POINT AND THAT FOCAL POINT IS JESUS CHRIST.

THE PARTS ARE DIFFERENT.

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER & YET WE ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME BODY WITH JESUS CHRIST AS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR THAT TIES US ALL TOGETHER.

LIKE OUR PHYSICAL BODIES, THE BODY OF CHRIST HAS TO BE MADE UP OF DIFFERENT PARTS.

GOD DIDN'T MAKE US ALL IDENTICAL.

IT'S A GOOD THING WE'RE *NOT*, ISN'T IT?

THINK ABOUT THAT.

DOES THE CHURCH REALLY NEED ANOTHER YOU?

I KNOW IT DOESN'T NEED ANOTHER ME!

AND WHAT IF THE CHURCH *WERE* MADE UP OF NOTHING MORE THAN A BUNCH OF "YOUS"? OR A BUNCH OF "ME'S"?

THERE'D BE A WHOLE LOT OF THINGS THAT WOULDN'T GET DONE, WOULDN'T THERE?

JUST AS WITH THE BODY, WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

REMEMBER WHAT WE HEARD PAUL SAYING LAST WEEK IN THE PASSAGE THAT PRECEDES THIS ONE - NO ONE'S ROLE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYONE ELSE'S.

WITHIN THE CHURCH, EACH ONE OF US HAS SOMETHING WE CAN DO.

THERE IS SOMETHING WE CAN DO THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN OR *WILL* DO.

NO ONE CAN SAY, "*I'M NOT NEEDED*" OR "*I'M NOT IMPORTANT.*"

VINCE LOMBARDI, THE LATE, LEGENDARY COACH OF THE GREEN BAY PACKERS, WAS ADDRESSING A GROUP ONE NIGHT.

HE WAS ASKED WHAT MADE FOR A GREAT FOOTBALL TEAM.

HE SAID, "*THERE ARE A LOT OF COACHES WITH GOOD BALL CLUBS WHO KNOW THE FUNDAMENTALS AND HAVE PLENTY OF DISCIPLINE BUT STILL DON'T WIN THE GAME.*"

HE SAID, "*THERE'S A THIRD ELEMENT THAT'S MISSING.*

IF YOU'RE GOING TO PLAY TOGETHER AS A TEAM, YOU'VE GOT TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

YOU'VE GOT TO LOVE EACH OTHER.

EACH PLAYER HAS TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT GUY AND SAYING TO HIMSELF, 'IF I DON'T BLOCK THAT MAN, PAUL'S GOING TO GET HIS LEGS BROKEN.

I HAVE TO DO MY JOB WELL IN ORDER THAT HE CAN DO HIS."

"*THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDIOCRITY & GREATNESS,*" LOMBARDI SAID THAT NIGHT, "*IS THE FEELING THESE GUYS HAVE FOR EACH OTHER.*"

THIS AFTERNOON, IN INDIANAPOLIS, I'M SURE JIM CALDWELL IS THINKING MUCH THE SAME THING ABOUT HIS COLTS TEAM.

AS GREAT A QUARTERBACK AS PEYTON MANNING IS, IF THE GUYS UP FRONT ON THE OFFENSIVE LINE DON'T DO THEIR JOB, MANNING'S GREATNESS WON'T MEAN A THING.

IN FACT, THAT COLTS OFFENSIVE LINE IS SO AWARE OF THEIR SHARED IMPORTANCE – THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING THEIR JOB TOGETHER – THAT IF ONE OF THEM USES THE WORD “I” IN AN INTERVIEW, THEY GET FINED BY THE OTHERS!

THEIR JOB IS TO PROTECT THE QUARTERBACK & PERSONAL ACCOLADES MEAN ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO THEM.

THINK ABOUT THAT IN RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

IN THE HEALTHY CHURCH, EACH MEMBER LEARNS TO CARE FOR OTHERS.

IF VINCE LOMBARDI OR JIM CALDWELL COULD EXPECT MEMBERS OF THEIR FOOTBALL TEAM TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER & PROTECT ONE ANOTHER, SURELY WE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO DO THE SAME WITHIN THE CHURCH.

I HAD A TOUGH COUPLE DAYS AT THE END OF THIS PAST WEEK.

ON THURSDAY, I ATTENDED A MEETING THAT I ENDED UP LEAVING AFTER 6 HOURS!

THEN I HAD A ROOT CANAL ON FRIDAY MORNING.

I'VE YET TO DECIDE WHICH WAS THE MOST PAINFUL, BUT AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE, I WAS PRETTY WORTHLESS AFTER MY VISIT TO THE DENTIST'S OFFICE.

IT WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A TOOTH & YET IT MADE EVERY PART OF ME FEEL LOUSY.

I DON'T NEED TO TELL YOU, I'M SURE, WHAT THAT'S LIKE.

IT MIGHT BE A TOOTH.

IT MIGHT BE YOUR BACK.

MAYBE IT'S A HEADACHE OR AN EARACHE.

IF ONE PART OF YOU HURTS, THE REST OF YOU HURTS.

THAT'S WHAT PAUL SAYS HERE.

“IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER TOGETHER WITH IT.”

THE ANALOGY OF THE BODY WORKS PERFECTLY HERE, DOESN'T IT?

IT SAYS THAT WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER & WHEN ONE OF US ENDURES HARDSHIP, PAIN, SORROW OR LOSS, WE ALL EXPERIENCE IT.

WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THIS BODY & IT'S VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ONE PART OF THE BODY TO SUFFER WITHOUT THE REST OF THE BODY EXPERIENCING THE PAIN.

LOOK AROUND YOU – WHEN THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU OR BEHIND YOU – WHEN THE ONE NEXT TO YOU OR ACROSS THE AISLE FROM YOU – GOES THROUGH HARD TIMES, YOU BEAR THOSE HARD TIMES WITH THEM.

WHAT PAUL IS TELLING US HERE IS THAT IF WE ARE TRULY THE BODY OF CHRIST, WE FEEL THINGS TOGETHER & WE ENDURE THEM TOGETHER & WE GET THROUGH THEM TOGETHER.

THE FLIP SIDE OF THIS IS THAT, NOT ONLY ARE YOU BEARING THE BURDENS OF OTHERS - THEY'RE BEARING YOUR BURDENS.

WHAT HE'S SAYING IS THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO EXPERIENCE THE DARKNESS OF LIFE'S TRIALS ALONE.

I REMEMBER, AS A TEEN-AGER, GETTING A LITTLE BOOK OF INSPIRATIONAL SAYINGS AS A BIRTHDAY PRESENT ONE YEAR.

I LOVED READING THROUGH THAT BOOK AND COMMITTING SOME OF THOSE QUOTATIONS TO MEMORY.

IT WAS MY FIRST INTRODUCTION TO THE MOVING WORDS OF JOHN DONNE: *"NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ENTIRE OF ITSELF...EVERY MAN IS A PIECE OF THE CONTINENT, A PART OF THE MAIN. ANY MAN'S DEATH DIMINISHES ME BECAUSE I AM A PART OF MANKIND. THEREFORE, NEVER SEND TO KNOW FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS; IT TOLLS FOR THEE."*

DONNE HAS EXPANDED THIS IDEA TO INCLUDE, NOT JUST THOSE WHO ARE PART OF OUR OWN FAMILY OR OUR OWN COMMUNITY OR OUR OWN CHURCH.

"ANYONE'S DEATH DIMINISHES ME...."

ISN'T THAT WHAT WE'VE SEEN OVER THE PAST 12 DAYS AS THE WORLD HAS WATCHED THE DEVASTATION IN HAITI?

WE HEAR THE TOLL OF THAT BELL & WE HEAR IT CALLING US TO RESPOND IN WHATEVER WAY WE CAN TO RELIEVE THE SUFFERING.

"IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER TOGETHER WITH IT..."

BUT NOTICE THAT PAUL SAYS SOMETHING ELSE HERE: *"IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL REJOICE TOGETHER WITH IT."*

THIS IS THE COMPLETION OF THE CHURCH AT ITS FINEST.

WE MOURN WITH THOSE WHO MOURN & WE REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE.

WHEN A BABY IS BORN, WHEN SOMEONE IS UNITED IN MARRIAGE, WHEN A HEALTH BATTLE IS WON, WHEN A NEW JOB IS SECURED, WHEN A GRADUATION TAKES PLACE, WE REJOICE TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THAT EXPERIENCE.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER – IN GOOD TIMES & IN BAD TIMES.

IN JAMES MICHENER'S NOVEL CHESAPEAKE, HE DEVOTES AN ENTIRE CHAPTER TO GEESE.

IN THE CHURCH, I THINK WE CAN LEARN A LOT FROM THE BEHAVIOR OF GEESE.

MICHENER SAYS, *"NO GOOSE, NOT EVEN A POWERFUL ONE COULD FLY AT THE HEAD OF THE WEDGE FOR LONG PERIODS.*

THE BUFFETING OF THE WIND AS THE POINT OF THE V BROKE A PATH THROUGH THE AIR TURBULENCE WAS TOO PUNISHING.

THE BEST A PRACTICED BIRD COULD DO WAS ABOUT 40 MINUTES, DURING WHICH TIME HE ABSORBED A CONSIDERABLE THRASHING.

AFTER HIS ALLOTTED TIME IN THE LEAD POSITION, THE EXHAUSTED GOOSE WOULD DROP TO THE BACK OF ONE OF THE ARMS OF THE WEDGE, AND THERE, WITH THE AIR WELL BROKEN AHEAD OF HIM, HE WOULD COAST ALONG IN THE WAKE OF THE OTHERS, RECOVERING HIS STRENGTH UNTIL IT CAME HIS TIME AGAIN TO ASSUME THE LEAD.

I THINK THIS PRESENTS SOME RATHER INTRIGUING IDEAS FOR US IN THE CHURCH.

IT TELLS US SOMETHING ABOUT SHARED LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH.

IT TELLS US THAT LEADERS NEED A BREAK EVERY NOW & THEN & SOMEONE ELSE NEEDS TO GET OUT FRONT & TAKE OVER.

BY FLYING IN THEIR "V " FORMATION, IT'S BEEN ESTIMATED THAT THE WHOLE FLOCK CAN FLY AT LEAST 71% FARTHER IN A SINGLE DAY THAN IF EACH BIRD FLEW ON ITS OWN.

THINK OF WHAT THIS MIGHT MEAN FOR THE CHURCH.

WHEN WE SHARE A COMMON DIRECTION AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY WE CAN GET WHERE WE'RE GOING QUICKER AND EASIER BECAUSE WE'RE TRAVELING ON THE THRUST OF ONE ANOTHER.

WHENEVER A GOOSE FALLS OUT OF FORMATION, IT SUDDENLY FEELS THE DRAG AND RESISTANCE OF TRYING TO GO IT ALONE AND QUICKLY GETS BACK INTO FORMATION TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE LIFTING POWER OF THE BIRD IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF IT.

IF WE HAVE AS MUCH SENSE AS A GOOSE, WE WILL STAY IN FORMATION WITH THOSE WHO ARE HEADING IN THE SAME DIRECTION WE ARE.

AND THEN THERE'S THE COMMUNICATION THE GEESE HAVE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THEY HONK FROM BEHIND TO ENCOURAGE THOSE UP FRONT TO KEEP UP THEIR SPEED.

WORDS OF APPRECIATION & ENCOURAGEMENT ARE ESSENTIAL IN THE CHURCH.

FINALLY, WHEN A GOOSE GETS SICK, OR IS WOUNDED BY GUNSHOT, AND FALLS OUT, TWO GEESE FOLLOW HIM DOWN TO HELP AND PROTECT HIM.

THEY STAY WITH HIM UNTIL HE IS EITHER ABLE TO FLY OR UNTIL HE IS DEAD, AND THEN THEY LAUNCH OUT ON THEIR OWN OR WITH ANOTHER FORMATION UNTIL THEY CATCH UP WITH THEIR GROUP.

THINK OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THAT FOR THE CHURCH - STANDING BY EACH OTHER & PROTECTING ONE ANOTHER WHEN LIFE GETS TOUGH.

IF PEOPLE KNEW WE WOULD STAND BY THEM LIKE THAT IN THE CHURCH, THEY'D BE BREAKING DOWN THE DOORS TO GET IN!

THIS IS WHAT THE WORLD OF THE FIRST CENTURY SAW WHEN IT LOOKED AT THE CHURCH.

THIS IS WHAT PAUL WAS ENCOURAGING THE CHURCH OF CORINTH TO BE.

IN THE SECOND CENTURY, THE EARLY CHURCH LEADER TERTULLIAN WAS DESCRIBING HOW OUTSIDERS SAW THE CHRISTIANS.

"LOOK," THEY SAY, "HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER" (FOR THEY THEMSELVES HATE ONE ANOTHER); "AND HOW THEY ARE READY TO DIE FOR EACH OTHER" (FOR THEY THEMSELVES ARE READIER TO KILL EACH OTHER).

THE WORLD HASN'T CHANGED MUCH SINCE THEN.

THERE ARE STILL THOSE WHO WOULD SOONER HATE & KILL ONE ANOTHER THAN LOVE & DIE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO BE SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

WE'RE CALLED TO BE SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THE WORLD HAS COME TO EXPECT.

**WE'RE CALLED TO GIVE OURSELVES COMPLETELY TO JESUS CHRIST & BE MEMBERS OF HIS
BODY.**

WE'RE CALLED TO SERVE & TO LOVE.

"IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, WE SUFFER TOGETHER.

IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, WE REJOICE TOGETHER."

THE REST OF THE WORLD LONGS TO BE PART OF A BODY LIKE THAT.

**WE NEED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT'S WHAT THEY SEE WHEN THEY LOOK AT US – THAT THEY SEE
THE BODY OF CHRIST AS CHRIST MEANT IT TO BE. AMEN.**

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