

BEING THE CHURCH (That Jesus Is Building)

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented to Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, August 2, 2015

Interdependence

Jim Uhey will be our pulpit guest next Sunday. He promised to send me a list of songs for worship. It didn't arrive. I waited as patiently as I could, then called Jim on the phone. He gently reminded me that I had said I would send him a list of songs that we commonly sing, so he could choose from it.

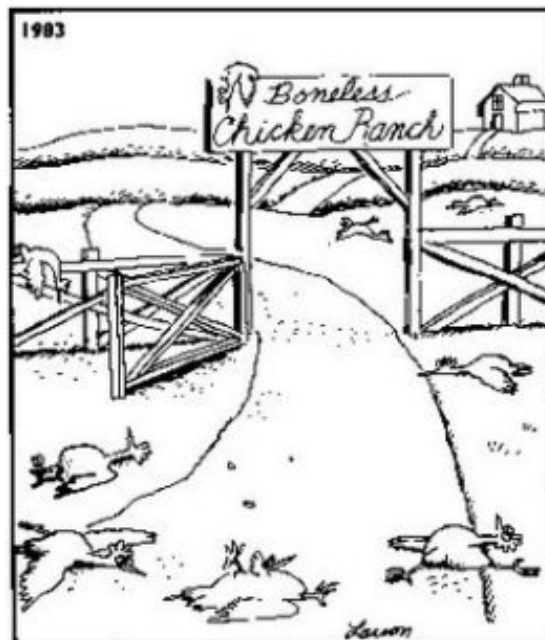
He couldn't give me his list until I sent him my list. That's called interdependence.

Think of the human body. We have a skeletal system, a nervous system, a muscular system, a circulatory system, a digestive system, a glandular system—and it's all contained by our skin.

If you had the finest and strongest skeletal system in the world, could you function with only that?

What if you had the finely-tuned muscles of a Jillian Michaels or a Tony Horton, but no skeletal frame, could you manage?

Courtesy of Gary Larson, we have a visual answer to that last question. Did you ever wonder where they get all those boneless chickens? Let me introduce you to Larson's "Boneless Chicken Ranch."



Paul asked, *“If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?”* (1 Corinthians 12:17; NLT)



When I read that verse, I think first about the shape and appearance of an eye. I usually imagine a giant eyeball, running around, sort of like Mike Wazowski (Monsters, Inc.):

But Paul speaks of the *function* of the eye, when he asks, *“How would you hear?”* So, what if this crazy creature *looked* as ordinarily human as you or me, but could see (that function) from every pore in his or her body? See in every direction at once! (Little kids would call that Mom or Dad.)

But this is simply an illustration to get us thinking. Paul’s theme is unity and interdependence in the Church. That’s more than appearances. It’s more than functions. And it’s more than personalities. It’s also about character—our inner being: our faith and faithfulness, our honesty, transparency, and reliability.

With all of those elements in mind, check out the context of that verse:

1 Corinthians 12:12-22 (NCV)

¹² *A person’s body is only one thing, but it has many parts. Though there are many parts to a body, all those parts make only one body. Christ is like that also.*

¹³ *Some of us are Jews, and some are Greeks. Some of us are slaves, and some are free. But we were all baptized into one body through one Spirit. And we were all made to share in the one Spirit.*

¹⁴ *The human body has many parts.*

¹⁵ *The foot might say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body.” But saying this would not stop the foot from being a part of the body.*

¹⁶ *The ear might say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body.” But saying this would not stop the ear from being a part of the body.*

¹⁷ *If the whole body were an eye, it would not be able to hear. If the whole body were an ear, it would not be able to smell.*

¹⁸ *If each part of the body were the same part, there would be no body. But truly God put all the parts, each one of them, in the body as he wanted them.*

¹⁹ *[included in verse 18]*

²⁰ *So then there are many parts, but only one body.*

²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the foot, “I don’t need you!”*

²² *No! Those parts of the body that seem to be the weaker are really necessary.*

Now, here’s the application of this principle:

1 Corinthians 12:24-26 (NCV)

²⁴ The more respectable parts of our body need no special care. But God put the body together and gave more honor to the parts that need it

²⁵ so our body would not be divided. God wanted the different parts to care the same for each other.

²⁶ If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor.

This is what God wants.

This is the way God's people behave.

This is the Church that Jesus is building.

"So I tell you, you are Peter. On this rock I will build my church, and the power of death will not be able to defeat it." (Matthew 16:18; NCV)

Whose church is it? Jesus'. Who has promised to build it? Jesus.

So, should we just sit on our hands and wait? No. WE are the church that Jesus is building. He is building US.

"Building" implies several things to us today: plans, permits, workers, tools, materials, costs, challenges, stages of completion, inauguration, maintenance.

In terms of the building of Jesus' Church:

- Plans = the Bible
- Permits = the blood of Christ , the Name of Jesus
- Workers = the Holy Spirit, angels, other people, yourself
- Tools = fellowship, Scripture, prayer, worship, witness
- Materials = heart, mind, body
- Costs = repentance, surrender, faith, change/growth
- Challenges = hindrances, distractions, opposition, casualness
- Stages of completion = God-relationship, Church-relationship, World-relationship
- Inauguration = ministry/service
- Maintenance = family, Church

Interdependence.

We depend on God. We depend on one another. And God depends on all of us.

God chose not to be alone, when He created the heavens and the earth.

Then He looked at the first human He had made and said, *“It is not good for the man to be alone.”* (Genesis 2:18) So, God made a woman and presented her to Adam.

God blessed the man and woman and said, *“Be fruitful and multiply.”* (Genesis 1:28) Fill the earth. That’s God’s plan.

We depend on God to provide what we need. Not for a certain kind of lifestyle that we imagine should be ours, but for the *real life* He calls us to. For the real challenges we face and the real opportunities that He places before us. *Do you depend on God to know and provide what you need?*

We depend on one another to supply. God’s provision usually comes through other people. Through services, through labor, through gifts, through fellowship. *Can others depend on you to supply what God has provided? Are you willing to lean on them for what you need?*

And God depends on all of us to trust Him and love one another. Trust God and love one another. Yes, it really is that simple. But that’s also really hard.

Trust doesn’t come easily. We’re scared. Our fear suggests to us that there’s a scarcity—not enough to go around. We get greedy. We hoard, instead of sharing. We hold on, instead of giving away.

We tend to trust only what we can control. And we *cannot* control God! In order to trust Him, we must acquaint ourselves with His story—the history of His communications and activities. This is the only way to discover that He is trustworthy.

And love is difficult, too. Apart from God, we scarcely love ourselves, or our families. Loving people we haven’t grown up with and haven’t been around all our lives is even more challenging.

We feel that we must change all that is unfamiliar, instead of letting people be themselves and expanding our own hearts to embrace them.

But this is the call of the Church. With the doors of our hearts ever open (and also ever vigilant), the Church invites *“whosoever will”* to come in and share life with us. It is an intentional thing (not accidental).

No church grows by accident, but by intent. Our church will grow when we see the people around us as potential church members and fellow travelers in the faith of Jesus—people to be invited, to be embraced, sometimes to be endured, and always to be nurtured.

That's a living church. That's a life-giving church.

Today, we have shared Holy Communion together—a reminder of the loving sacrifice that drove our Savior to the cross on our behalf, a celebration of the new life and new community that faith in Him introduces.

Now that we have swallowed the bread and the juice and put down our empty cups, let's re-commit ourselves to carry on the spirit of this communion—to our homes and dinner tables, to our neighborhoods, to our workplaces, to our daily life—trusting God and loving one another, and adding to the church those who are being saved. Will you join me in doing so?