

## ***“Interdependence Day”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
World Communion Sunday, October 7, 2018  
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Holy Scriptures: First Corinthians 11: 17-26; 12: 12-26

1 Corinthians 11: 17-26

### *Abuses at the Lord’s Supper*

<sup>17</sup> Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. <sup>21</sup> For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

### *The Institution of the Lord’s Supper*

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for<sup>[g]</sup> you. Do this in remembrance of me.” <sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

### *One Body with Many Members*

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the

body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> 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."

<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> 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; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

### **Interdependence Day**

*I think that I shall never see  
a billboard lovely as a tree.  
Perhaps, unless the billboards fall,  
I'll never see a tree at all.*

--Ogden Nash

Trees are remarkable creations of God.

Seed dare to break out from the safety of the pod

to send roots ever downward, commissioning sprouts to find air and sunlight.

Roots dig deep into whatever soil they find themselves inhabiting,

seeking out water and nutrients,

spreading far and wide to grab hold of Mother Earth

to hold steady whatever weight they must bear.

Trunks solid and round,

thickening with each year of life,

showing the beauty of age and experience,

supplying support for branches and new buds

while at the same time

transferring resources up and down the tree,

hauling more gallons of water than we can

fathom.

Branches reach skyward,

ever expanding, ever seeking the light and warmth of the Sun.

From branches spring forth leaves, flowers, and seeds,

colorful, supple, and fruitful,

absorbing nutrients from sunlight and air,

sharing their joy with the rest of the body.

Every tree God creates is a specimen of interdependence.

Can you imagine roots living without trunk,

or leaves surviving without branches?

Each part of the tree, from the deepest root to very tip-top,  
is essential, interconnected, interdependent.

The Apostle Paul referred to the power and promise of interdependence, writing:

*“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.*

*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or  
free—*

They say a bunch of lush, deep purple grapes  
boasted to passersby how superior they were to the homely grey vine.

How do you think that ended?

We know, my friends, that each part is necessary for the whole  
to have life and to live into God’s abundance.

As Paul said:

<sup>14</sup> *Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

<sup>15</sup> *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.*

<sup>16</sup> *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.*

<sup>17</sup> *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?*

<sup>18</sup> *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body,  
each one of them, as God chose.” (1 Cor. 12: 14-18)*

These thoughts were in Paul’s mind while he planted a new church in Ephesus.

Planting new churches requires a tremendous amount of energy.

All Paul wanted was to give these good folks his all.

Except while in Ephesus

word reached him that the fledgling church he had started in Corinth

had growing pains, conflict pains, and some folks were pains in the—

As best he could tell from a distance,

there was dissent over communion and division into tribes.

The Body of Christ was in danger of being torn asunder.

Battle lines were drawn in the sand. Stances declared. Sides taken.

*“I am for Apollos!” “I am for Cephas!”*

*“I am for Paul!” “I am for Christ!”*

Who is welcome at the Table of the Lord?

During the sacraments some folks are drunk;

some eat everything before we get there;

sometimes we wonder what liturgy to use.

So, while building a church in Ephesus,

Paul wrote a letter in his head,  
then handwrote the beginning so they would recognize his handwriting,  
then dictated the rest,  
resulting in a letter we call First Corinthians.

*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.  
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.  
Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?  
Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?  
Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?  
But strive for the greater gifts.” (1 Cor. 12: 27-31)*

Paul figured out that trusting our interdependence is critical for the Body of Christ.

Just as a tree points us to the glory of God,  
significant congregations like this one and so many of our sister churches  
must respect and appreciate the spiritual connections  
of roots, trunk, branches and fruits.

One of our many gifts here at First Christian Church of Decatur  
is that we're a multiple-generation,  
integrated, diverse, open-minded, mission-oriented congregation.

We may boast--in a humble sort of way--  
that we're richly blessed to have Builders, Boomers, & Busters (aka Generation  
Y),

Bridgers (aka Generation X), Millennials,  
plus children whose era is too new for a label.

Some of us were dedicated, baptized, and/or married here.  
Some of us heard here the call of God to be servant leaders.  
Some of us said goodbye and thank you to beloved friends and family here.  
Some of us uttered our first words here.

Today Madeline is seven;  
her first word that we heard spoken aloud  
was in church during a Children's Sermon.

A microphone near her broadcast her sweet voice saying, "Amen!"

Paul said to the Corinthians and he says to Christians today:  
*“God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,  
<sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body,  
but the members may have the same care for one another.*

<sup>26</sup> *If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;  
if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Cor. 12: 24b-26)*

Churches, like trees, are multi-talented and multi-faceted, interdependent.  
Churches are commissioned by Christ to embody God's love,  
to teach the Word and the ethics of holistic living,  
to be advocates for justice and mercy,  
to proclaim the Good News,  
to offer the sacraments with integrity and hospitality,  
and to care for the lost, the last and the least in the whole wide world.  
Trees, like churches, care for each other: did you know that?  
Did you catch the NPR report called "How Do Trees Collaborate?"  
(National Public Radio, January 13, 2017)

GUY RAZ: It's the TED Radio Hour from NPR. I'm Guy Raz. And on today's show ideas about the Power Of Networks, how those connections and those pathways define the world around us in our cities, in our relationships, in our bodies and especially in nature. So about 25 years ago, forest ecologist Suzanne Simard had a hunch.

SUZANNE SIMARD: Yes, that's right.

RAZ: She thought that trees could talk. ...most ecologists believe that trees competed against each other, that their world was, like, a Darwinian struggle with winners and losers.

SIMARD: Yeah, you know, that they're competing for light and water and nutrients.

RAZ: And that the strongest trees were the ones that grew tall, the ones that dominated the canopy and took all the resources.

SIMARD: It was like, oh, I'm going to get what I want. And I don't care what my neighbor needs.

RAZ: But Suzanne's experiment showed that something else was true. [She proved that through their roots and the use of underground fungi, trees and plants communicate.]

SIMARD: They're...sending messages back and forth that balances the resource distribution among the community.

RAZ: In other words, trees aren't just connected. They're...sharing resources with each other. [When beetles attack one tree, other trees increase their defenses.]

Trees care for each other.

Not only is a single tree a specimen of interdependence, a forest is as well.

Trees in a forest,

each one unique, diverse in their variety, stately in their elegance,  
look out for one another. Share resources, wisdom, joy.

Sounds like the Church of Jesus Christ.

Sounds like what our society yearns for, hopes for, longs for.

In this age of madness and meanness, we hunger for hope. Love. Trust. Community.

Yet at the same time we have enabled a cultural phenomenon called tribalism.

Tribes can be racial, geographical, gender oriented,  
political affiliation, generational, and so forth.

People tend to gravitate to their own generation or like-minded group  
for social interaction and support.

We tell ourselves we would be more comfortable with our own group, tribe, kind.

Yet whenever we are seeds of Christ,

we dare to bust out of the safety of our pods

to plant roots in soils once strange to us

and raise a sprout to test the air and see the light,

we discover a whole new world...and that God is there.

Life would be really, really dull if everyone was our own age,

or looked like us, or talked like us, or thought like us, or believed like us.

There may be homogenous societies,

but such is not the path laid out before us.

Are you like me, appreciating the moments

when we find our self in situations

where we encounter people gathered together

who are in various stages of life?

Where can you go today and feel both welcome and at home

while rubbing shoulders with six generations, with multiple tribes,

with a variety of souls, ideas, dreams?

500 neighbors at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic on our church lawn is a happening event,

a time and place where we experience true joy in a diverse company.

Reunions comes to mind.

Packed stadiums, parade crowds, festivities on the courthouse square.

Why not the Church?!

Paul encourages the church on this World Communion Sunday:

*"...strive for the greater gifts.*

*And [Christ] will show you a still more excellent way." (1 Cor. 12: 31)*

While on a tour of California's giant sequoias,

a guide pointed out to a group of visitors

that the sequoia tree roots grow just barely below the surface.

"That's impossible!" exclaimed a visitor.

"I'm a country boy, and I know that if roots don't grow deep into the earth,

strong winds may blow the trees over.”  
“Not sequoia trees,” said the guide.  
“They grow only in groves.  
Their roots intertwine under the surface of the earth.  
So, when the strong winds come, they hold each other up.”  
In a sense, communities of faith are called to be like the giant sequoias.  
Family, friends, neighbors, the Body of Christ in every county and country  
should be havens of mercy and succor and justice  
so that when the strong winds of life blow,  
we may serve as reinforcements, to hold each other up,  
because thanks be to God,  
every day is Interdependence Day.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*