

The Church of the Pilgrimage
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I Corinthians 12: 12-21; 27

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Communion Meditation

It wasn’t the *perfect* mission trip. For one thing, we forgot the “Love in Action “ Church of the Pilgrimage banner that we’d brought with us last year, the one specially made for such purposes. I made plenty of lists of things to remember, but somehow that item, stored here at the church in a closet, got left behind.

We made do. When we finally took a total group picture of everyone in front of the van We all made a heart, like this (two hands forming a heart space) We brought love to Maine. We take it home again. Mission trips are about that – finding concrete ways to show God’s love.

So by way of a brief communion meditation I’d like to hold up a few other pictures for you –pictures, images taken directly from this past week’s Maine Mission trip.

Imagine a small white house. It sits on a cove, with ocean to one side. Its shingles are peeling, it is badly in need of paint, and the entrance to the house has a stair of sorts...but it is rickety, and unstable looking and the woman who is in her nineties and lives inside walks with a walker. The house needs scraping, painting and a new porch and ramp. It is one of three projects for our group of seventeen, and the first day when we look at it, it looks like a lot of work.

Now, five days later imagine that house freshly painted, all four sides done and a new porch landing and an (almost) finished ramp (this next week’s work crew will finish that up) David Grainger, the director of Downeast Missions,

calls this “the weekly miracle” -- that people working together can make what at first looks so daunting happen, that people working together can work through mosquitoes and flies, summer heat and summer rain, tiredness and feelings of being overwhelmed to make someone’s home sturdier, drier, safer, better.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” There is nothing like a mission trip to make this text come alive. On our first night’s gathering, last Sunday night, we each took a rock and wrote on it what it is we bring to this week. Hard Work. Friendship. A Sense of Humor. Flexibility. We each then took a turn placing our rock on the little table right there by the rough wooden cross, saying what it is we bring out loud.

The next day, as we begin work together on the various sites, there are, of course, among us various levels of skill. Some of us can design a landing and a ramp, or a set of stairs. Some of us have good carpentry skills. Love using power tools. Some of us do not love or feel all that comfortable with those things. We do other things – dragging brush or stacking firewood, putting up screens or staining decking. Some of us love to climb ladders and paint. Others prefer to stay on solid ground, hold the ladder, or go clean the paintbrushes. We all find a way to plug in.

It’s the same way too at each day’s end with preparing meals. Some work at the stove, others chop a salad. Stephanie cooks her wickedly delicious apple crisp and cinnamon rolls we enjoy on several mornings. Paul turns uneaten barbeque chicken into a wonderful chicken salad for lunches. In cooking, in cleaning, even when kayaking across a lake or traveling together down the highway we are learning things about working together, about being the body of Christ in this way.

And we learn that along with helping to fix up someone’s home we have other things to offer – like *community*. One of the women whose house we worked on, Nancy was her name, seemed to grow happier, more spirited by the day. Eighty years old and living by herself at another shore location -- at the end of a long dirt road, isolated by Maine winters and distance between neighbors -- Nancy happily sat with us at lunch time, enjoying the conversation, the human connection. Picture an eighty year old woman out smiling in her field of daisies. Picture her chest a little lopsided, for she is a breast cancer survivor. Picture her sitting on her deck reading a poem she’s written – a good poem. Picture her sitting in her yard pressing flowers getting up from time to time to encourage us in what we’re doing. Picture her giving kids Klondike bars, and hugs, and asking everyone to visit her again next year.

Mission trips are good for many things. We get out of ourselves. We experience a new and different place, meet new people, make someone else’s life a little better. We live more fully in the present, focusing on the day’s task the project to be constructed, the shingles to paint. But we also learn about being present to each other. We realize it isn’t just eighty year old women living alone who need human connection – we need it to.

And yes, the kids had their phones. But mostly they didn't have them on, except for picture taking. So picture three girls on a ladder. One is at the peak, painting some twenty five feet off the ground. Another is midway up, handing that girl a new bucket of paint. And the third is simply on the ground, holding the ladder steady. Picture the pastor snapping that picture, a living breathing example of Love in Action.

I stand before you today with so many pictures of interdependence and interconnection in my mind, and I know we'll all look forward to seeing more of these pictures in the fall when the kids report on their trip.

"Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many. 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."

Growing up we live with so much competition. Who is in the advanced classes, who is making the grades, who is winning the awards, or being asked to be class valedictorian? It is true for adults too. Who is gaining recognition, or fame, or living in a big house or driving a big car? Who belongs to the country club, or has political clout in town?

It's funny how a mission trip, with its emphasis on everyone together, everyone having something to offer, feels healing – an antidote to a society that makes people often feel less than an alternative reality to attitudes, and judgment, that separate people rather than bringing people together.

I hope today on this Fourth of July weekend we can celebrate the freedom we have, and remember with gratitude those who have given their life energies to help us have it. I also hope we pause to remember how interdependent we are and how Jesus calls us to stay in working, loving relationship with one another. The Protestant cannot say to the Catholic, or the UU, or the Muslim or the Jew "I have no need of you." The Bernie Sanders supporter cannot say to the Trump supporter "I have no need of you." I hope this Fourth of July we can speak of a patriotism that recognizes that we are all in this together.

Before we climbed into the van yesterday morning to head on home, before we took our "love picture" David Grainger, the director of DownEast Ministries, spoke with us. He held up a well cleaned paint brush, from the little white house by the sea project. In contrast to the totally crudded up one he'd held up for us Monday morning, with a plea that we please do better, he said *this* brush (the clean one he held up before us) shows the care you brought to your work this week. He then thanked us for another reason – for our group, he said, had come open to others. He clenched his hands, and said we are living in times when people are not so open to each other, when people are holding on tight, and insisting on their own way. But again and again Jesus brought his disciples into situations where he taught them to unclench, to let go and reach out.

David then reached out to one of the kids as if to shake a hand. "See, when I offer you my hand I am saying I have no weapon. I see you and recognize you and bring you no ill will." he said.

I decided in that moment that despite a forgotten banner, it kind of *was* a perfect mission trip. It was a great little sermon send off David gave us, speaking to our lives beyond this work week. A great image too for this morning -- a day when we will once again share this meal that Jesus gave us.

We are all of us together the body of Christ. May we continue to learn what this means. And may God bless us richly in our common life together.

Amen.