

**Third Sunday after the Epiphany  
And the 192d Annual Meeting of  
Grace Episcopal Church,  
St. Francisville, LA  
27 January 2019**

**1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a**

The reading from 1 Corinthians today reminds me of the late Rodney Dangerfield. You remember him. He was famous for saying that he got no respect. He is the ultimate example of an inferiority complex. Let us read some of his jokes,

- “When I was born the doctor came out to the waiting room and said to my father, ‘I'm very sorry. We did everything we could...but he pulled through.’
- I tell you, with my doctor, I don't get no respect. I told him, ‘I've swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills.’ He told me to have a few drinks and get some rest.
- Some dog I got too. We call him Egypt because he leaves a pyramid in every room”.

The Corinthian church is in many ways a problem church, but it is also a church that is very representative of many churches today. For 11 chapters Paul has been answering a series of questions posed by the Corinthians about a variety of issues. Now he addresses perhaps the most significant issue, and that is the issue of divisions within the Church. There is a group in the Church who think that their particular spiritual gifts are more important than any other gifts. These people feel entitled, feel like they have the right to determine who belongs in the church and who doesn't belong in the church, they feel like there are those among them who have nothing to offer. These people are the eye who says to the hand, "I have no need of you," and the head who says to the feet, "I have no need of you." "I have no use for you", "I can do without you", "If you don't like the way I do things, go away!" These are the people who believe they are special because God has given them a particular ministry within the church. These people in fact believe the church would be a better place if it was made up of people just like them.

Paul combats this believe by asking some simple questions, “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? In other words, “Do everyone in the church have the same roles?” “Do all of you have the gift of hospitality?” “Do all of you have the gift of cooking, cleaning, praying for someone who is sick?” “Do all of you have a heart for missions, a passion for youth work, the gift of administration, the gift of counseling and being able to listen to others when they hurt?” The obvious answer is “No”. We don’t all have all the same gifts. Some of us are better at some things and some of us are better at other things. Just to give you an example, some of you are great at cooking, and I am great at eating everything you cook. We all have a role to play. The body needs both the thinkers as well as the doers, the mystics as well as the lawyers, the healers as well as the intercessors. Paul today tells us that “unless the many perform their assigned functions, however diverse, the one body would not exist as a single entity, but as a chaotic array of conflicting forces without focus or coherence” (Thiselton, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 1002).

This is a big issue for us in the church today. The top reason why seekers never return to a church they have visited is not the liturgy, the worship, or even the preacher, but rather, they don’t feel like they belong. They were not greeted, they were not invited to coffee hour, someone looked at them resentfully because they sat on his pew, or they felt “interviewed” and “interrogated” when they visited the first time. They were made to feel like feet in a world filled with heads. They simply didn’t feel welcome. Paul today reminds us that we all have a place and we all have a role to play if the body of Christ is going to be a healthy and functional body.

But, there is another group today that Paul talks about and that is the group of Rodney Dangerfield. “When I was born I was so ugly, that instead of slapping me, the doctor slapped my momma”. This is the group who thinks they have nothing to contribute. They feel that, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body." They feel they have nothing to contribute. They are not as holy as the clergy, as organized as the women in the Altar Guild, as gracious as the hospitality committee, as eloquent as those who openly pray for others, etc. They anxiously compare themselves with others and many feel jealousy and discouragement. Eventually “they develop an inferiority complex and lose all their joy of salvation” (Ibid, p. 1003).

Paul today reminds us that unity is not the same as uniformity. For us to be a church we don't all have to wear a members jacket, we don't all have to think the same way, eat the same types of food, or even subscribe to the same way of thinking or the same theology. Unity rather means that we all do our part as we embody Christ in the world. It means that as a church we don't think of ourselves primarily as individuals, but as local communities, who belong to a larger whole. "Our sense of identity lies not in the role we play, nor the status, nor the reward our role brings, but in the sense of oneness with the life of Christ which is the life of God - and ultimately the life of all that is. We are not asked as individuals to be Christ or Christs, let alone saviours of the world, although many suffer from this misconception and the burn out it produces. We are asked to be members of a body, of Christ, and to play our part - not more, not less" (NIV Biblical Commentary).

We all have a role to play and no role is more important than any other role. I am surprised and impressed every day by the level of commitment of some of our parishioners. Yesterday, for example, we had two groups of parishioners in full exercise of their ministry. One group of six was a Solomon Episcopal Conference Center getting training to start a discerning committee for one of our parishioners who is interested in the Diaconate. The second group was here in this church, doing their Altar Guild duties of setting up and getting ready fo today's church. And there are hundreds of examples like that taking place every day in our church. From the ministry of the Mission and Outreach Committee, to Altar Guild, to Pre-school and office volunteers, to the Nursing Home team and the Centering Prayer Group, we all have a role to play.

How appropriate that we should have this passage today as we celebrate together the accomplishments and challenges we experienced in 2018. Today, as we elect new Vestry members, as we discuss new ministries, and as we plan for the challenges ahead, let us ask God to give us the courage to do our part, for the healthy functioning of this, his body on earth. May we all come to realize that we all play a role in making sure that Grace is a welcoming, engaging, nurturing, and Christ-filled Church. Amen!