

Living the Way of Love
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1 Corinthians 12

The message in today's Corinthians passage really smacked me in the face this week. Paul is writing with great power about what is wrong with the church then and now. We as members of the modern church and the modern world are Corinth written in large letters across the face of the earth. I am just as guilty as the rest and find myself thoroughly convicted by Paul's passage in regards to how I view and treat other parts of the body of Christ in these troubled times.

I have long held that Paul's letter to the church in Corinth is the most pertinent and timely of the books of the New Testament at least in terms of how our society is acting. Several members were upset with how the church was acting and wrote to Paul to complain and ask his guidance. Now we really do not know what they asked but what we do have is Paul's answer and advice.

Paul's image of the community being represented by a body was a standard metaphor in the Greek rhetorical world. Paul however stands the normal metaphor on its head if you will. The standard metaphor was loaded with hierarchical images. Some body parts were more important than others, like the head and the heart. Others were subservient or inferior to the more important parts of the bodies.

Last week Paul made clear that there are a variety of gifts of the Spirit and that none are more important than others. Paul this week makes the point that no part of the body is more important than the other, that in fact all parts are dependent upon the other. Eyes and ears are both needed for without one or the other the body is either blind or deaf. Without hands or feet the body's ability to do the work given to it is diminished. Paul speaks of the inferior parts, which are the internal organs, are what we clothe with great honor. This was a revolutionary look at what had been a standard metaphor.

So what does this have to do with us today in our church and in our society. I believe the actual problem is the same. Along with many I have been following the story about the students from the high school in Kentucky and the Native American group by the Lincoln Memorial. Chuck mentioned this Tuesday night in vestry and is working on a discussion with the EYC kids tonight. After hearing what he said I replied, "Well that will preach." So I took the lead from there.

I am not going to focus on the actions of the protesters. I truly do not know what happened or the whole story. What I want us to consider is the reactions especially on social media. The way people immediately ran to their corners and declared wrong doing and pointed fingers. There was a great deal of we are right and the others are wrong in this whole social media storm. There was a lot of I do not need this part of the

body in what has gone on this week. Several prominent bloggers I follow admitted that they had in fact jumped to conclusions and apologized.

A bishop said to a clergy gathering several years ago, “we used to disagree while walking towards each other. Now we are disagreeing while walking in opposite directions.” The I have no need of you mind set has become an epidemic.

In counter point to that Wednesday Night Bible Study watched Bishop Curry’s sermon at the opening Eucharist at General Convention¹. In this sermon he rolled out the Way of Love that has been developed for the Episcopal Church. This is a Rule of Life and I have spoken of this before. If we approach situations like last week through this Rule of Life we at least can gain control of how we as individuals react and examine how we can bring the love of Jesus into such a situation.

Richard Rohr, Fr. James Martin and our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry all look at this in a similar way. I find it interesting that Richard Rohr’s writings this week speak to it even though they are planned months in advance. This is the question of Orthodoxy vs Orthopraxy. Bishop Curry in his sermon said, “It really isn’t about if you can recite the Nicene or the Apostle’s Creed, the Way of Love is about jumping into the arms of Jesus and living as he did and taught!. This is what is meant by Orthopraxy, living the right way, acting the right way, living the way of love. Orthodoxy focuses on right beliefs, that’s all the doctrine and creeds. By the way, did you know the first 7 church councils were all called by emperors, not church leaders? Think about that for a moment.

Now the Creeds are important, but they are not everything. In the Apostles Creed we say Jesus is born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and buried. Notice that this jumps from his birth to his crucifixion without anything about his time on earth. Yet all of his important teachings are from his time with us, as God with us, the fruit of his incarnation is missing from the creed. That’s where the lessons for today really are and we pass over this in our creeds.

Now it is important that we know what we believe, but if that is as far as we go, then we end up a mess. It is all too easy to then retreat to our camps, declare that we are right and everybody else is wrong. That’s when we set up conflicts like we saw this past week, both in the initial incident and in the way social media blew up following it. We need to do better, we are called to be better.

At General Convention Bishop Curry laid out the Rule of Life that is the Way of Love. There are seven principles. Now reach into your bulletins and pull out the insert. I handed this out once before in the fall, but it is time to look at this again.

Turn: Pause listen and choose to follow Jesus. Notice the first action, pause. Wow how different last week might have been if people had just taken a moment to pause,

¹ To view the sermon go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFuRUy5GIEE>

then listen. Most important is to follow Jesus, to act as Jesus would do. Let's remember we are all members of the body and every part, every person is important.

Learn: Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings. Get the forward Day by Day book or get their app and take at least a minute in the morning to read some scripture. Get one of the other apps out there for daily reflection put out by Forward Movement or any number of groups.

Pray: Dwell intentionally with God each day: Talk and listen to God each and every day.

Worship: Gather in community weekly to thank, praise and dwell with God: This is one of the promises we just reaffirmed on the Baptism of Jesus from our Baptismal Covenant. We need you here on Sunday morning as part of the body and you need to be with us. Christianity is not a solo affair.

Bless: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve: Take your faith out of these doors into the world. We need to figure out how to bless people.

Go: Cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus: Go and make disciples. Go and proclaim good news, be witnesses by thought word and deed as our baptismal promises say. Go preach the gospel, use words only if necessary. Live the gospel and that's how you share it.

Rest: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration: Take time for yourself, care for yourself however you need to do that. Even God rested on the 7th day!

Now take this insert home with you. Put it up somewhere where you will see it and help remind you to live these principles and I promise your life will change and I believe you can change the lives of those around you. That in itself is a blessing to all.

When the world puts in you the middle of the craziness that seems to be the new normal, lean on these 7 principles. As Michael Curry says, jump into the arms of Jesus, live the life that Jesus teaches us in that space of the period in the Apostles Creed. That's how we change the world, how we make it a better place, one person at a time. The change starts with us.