

2021 Nov 21 Rev. Sara M. Holland Sermon

Scripture: John 18:33-37 & 1st Corinthians 12:12-27

Title: “Decisions: Family & Truth”

Theme: Reign of Christ Sunday

## Introduction

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” Many of us have distinct memories of times when we have been around someone who was really negative or really positive. We might remember the reverberation or the resonance of an encounter or a comment. A hug when we needed it; an insult when we couldn’t handle it.

In the past two weeks we have explored intention and connection as they relate to family and our sacred texts. Today, we will think about decisions we make with regard to family or chosen family: how might we decide to honor each other this week? How might our honoring one another show the world the deep hope of our faith?

This is, indeed, one of the implied questions of the epistle and is always a question of the gospel: How might we decide to honor each other?

Many of us notice, I hope all of us notice that our society sends clear messages that some people are dispensable.

According to the epistle, each and every part of the body - each and every person is critically important. In fact, we hear a more dramatic and challenging repetition from the gospel itself as well as the Hebrew Bible *in* the epistle. Verse 22b from the 12th chapter of Corinthians: “The members of the body that seem to be weaker are **indispensable**.” Indispensable. In other words, it is not just that each member is of great importance; it is the case that we Christ followers ought to work **EVEN** harder to welcome, to support, to love those who have too often been deemed unworthy of love and respect. We see this in Jesus as he accompanies the woman at the well, as he tends to the needs of those who would’ve been considered ritually unclean and as he makes space for children.

And, as always, we work to be conscious of the fact Jesus’ actions and words are those which point directly to the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

The tradition of working to care for those who are too often labeled as unworthy is an ancient tradition and one into which we must step if we are to live out God’s realm, God’s kingdom.

Our high-lighted human struggle this morning is that it is far too often that society sends messages that some people are dispensable. Because we are part of society, we internalize these messages, even if we do not intend to do so.

In the first century, the time or occasion of the letter to the Corinthians is one of some level of discord. Of course, we can relate this, now 2000 years later. The recipients of this letter saw discord and so do we. The image of the body as a whole with many parts came from the larger framework of the Greco-Roman culture - the imagery was utilized to keep harmony among people.

A scholar of the New Oxford Annotated Bible notes: “In the well-known fable of Menenius Agrippa, the Roman senator compared a strike by the common people to a revolt of the hands, mouth and teeth against the belly, resulting in the death of the body.”<sup>1</sup> This note in the annotation goes on to describe how Paul was using this metaphor in a subversive manner.

Originally, the metaphor would have been employed or used as a way to control the masses but Paul was utilizing the metaphor to show the importance of the subversive parts of the gospel and of the Hebrew Bible which STILL make people uncomfortable. These core parts of the gospel are ignored in some ways. These are the parts of the gospel which remind us all to pay more attention to who is typically receiving honor; who has been deemed as dispensable in our society and what we might do to uplift those who are mistreated. It is easier, of course, to keep the status quo.

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<sup>1</sup>2053, New Oxford Annotated Bible

Paul questions conventional assumptions about honor and status - much like the prophets who came before him did.

And so, we must ask ourselves what honor and status should we question today? How might we decide to honor each other? *5 mins, 11 seconds*

We might decide to take seriously the fact that the Americans with Disabilities Act has been under attack for a number of years and it was only passed in 1990. Practically, this week, there might only be so much legislative work we can do but you know what we can do? We can ensure that if we have invited someone to our home for the holiday who has a physical or a developmental disability of any type we accommodate them as best as we can. How else might we decide to honor each other?

Perhaps we can figure out a way to build in some care for those who live outside? We might want to get involved at the Bridge House here in Plymouth or even consider saying hi to someone who is asking for a ride or food if someone approaches us here in town or if we happen to be in Concord for holiday shopping. Even if we aren't able to help someone, we may honor them by a simple short conversation - by acknowledging their humanity and their struggle.

How else might we decide to honor each other? This week, we have the opportunity to honor those who have been killed as a result of violence. We might recall, especially, those who have too often been called dispensable. In efforts to be sincere and authentic, it is wise to hold moments of silence for First Nations people this week, in this region we may honor and learn about the Abenaki people. We might name the reality of the ways that many of us have benefitted from the oppression and dislocation of such groups. We might recall and hold moments of silence for those who have died at the hands of public servants. Those who were said to be the ones who would protect and serve *all*.

I pray that we will set sincere intentions with one another, that we will show deep empathy for one another and that we will truly honor each other this week. For we can make the decision to honor each other. *7 mins, 53 seconds*

“If one member of the body suffers, all suffer together with the body.” Let’s return to the point that certain moments in our lives can have deep resonance and reverberation - for either negative or positive.

We will each make decisions this week - some smaller, some larger. As we sit with both chosen and biological family, let us recall the ways that the gospel calls us to subversive care for one another.

God's love can resonate, can emanate, can reverberate from our actions and words. Once we set intention, we can more easily aim for the empathic bonds of the gospel and then we may decide to uplift those who have typically been cast aside in the world.

If we are able to make decisions to uphold the gospel by honoring those in need, we will actively give God's truth to the world. We may live authentically in gospel love.

So - yes - there is discord and uncertainty right now - we are not far from where the Corinthians were. Let us find hope in the epistle today:

All may rejoice together.

On the front of the bulletin this week, there is a picture of the almost 100 year old statue which has been named one of the 7 wonders of the world. This statue is called Christ the Redeemer and sits atop Corcovado or a mountain called 'hunchback' in Rio de Janeiro. If you want a reminder this week of the hope we find as one people, together in Christ, revisit this image - cut it out, place it on your refrigerator.

**On this Reign of Christ Sunday, seek comfort with the knowledge that we have wisdom guiding us for our decisions. Giving thanks this week, recall the ways we are all so deeply connected.**

One body, different parts - all have a call. During this week - seek out truth, know you have a call and make decisions on the basis of Love.

*9 mins 46 secs.*