**January 27, 2019**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

Today’s reading from 1 Corinthians is the second part of what we began last week. Paul wrote that “each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” not for any one person or family’s good. In this regard, Christianity is not a religion of lone rangers. God gave us the church so that we can work for the common good: the good of the whole. Each week we come through the doors as individuals with different strengths and weaknesses. And each week, as we worship God, sing together, and share prayers of joy and concern, God transforms us into community.

If the eye says to the hand, “I don’t need you.” Or the head says to the feet, “I don’t like you,” 1) they are not telling the truth (because they are part of the same body, whether they like it or not) and 2) they are seeking only their *individual* good, not the common good.

When in our American political system, the Democratic party says to the Republican Party, “We don’t like you. We don’t need you.” They are not seeking the common good, for they are ignoring and excluding a significant part of our whole body. When the President says to the Speaker of the House, “I don’t like you. I don’t need you.” He is not seeking the common good. He is acting only out of self-interest.

OR, when someone in the church says to another member, “I don’t like that. I’m not listening to you. I’m going to insist on my own way.” They are not seeking the common good. When one committee or congregation says to another committee or congregation, “We don’t like you. We don’t need you. We’ll do it our own way.” They are not seeking the common good. They are acting only in self-interest.

As Paul lovingly reminded the squabbling Corinthian community, we are part of the same body. Though many members with different abilities and interests, we are dependent upon one another for success and survival. Because we are one body. Rich and poor, liberal and conservative, formal and casual, hymn lover and silence keeper, thinker and do-er, generous and stingy, we need one another because we are part of the one body. “The members of the body that anyone thinks to be weaker are *actually* indispensable. And those members which we think are less honorable actually have greater honor… God has arranged the body so that there would be no dissension within it, but all would care for one another.”

So what happens when there is dissension amongst the members? What happens when the body attacks itself? What happens when the Republicans and Democrats are deadlocked? What happens when the government shuts down for a month? What happens when members of the body *don’t* care for one another, but only act on their individual interests? It is as though cancer invades our body. We get sick. We all get sick – not just the offender. We all grow weak – not just the troublemaker. It’s in our best interest to care for one another and support one another and maintain appropriate checks and balances so that we are always moving towards health and wholeness.

If you have been baptized, if you are a member of our congregation, if you regularly worship and participate in our mission, if you attend Sunday School or teach Sunday School, if you give to Sweet Hollow, if you serve with Sweet Hollow, if you pray for Sweet Hollow, if you are a member of another Presbyterian congregation on Long Island, if you receive our church’s reports when you volunteer for a Presbytery committee, if you are wondering about our future and worrying over our share future, you are part of the body that is Sweet Hollow. We are in this together. We are all working together for the same purpose – the shared health of our one body. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

So that if one of our church committees *isn’t* functioning properly, then we are all suffering because of it. Or if one of our neighboring Presbyterian congregations is suffering, then we are all suffering because of it. But on the other hand, when one of our members or part of our whole is doing well, then we all rejoice and thrive because of it.

I have seen this exemplified at Sweet Hollow. After the death or loss of a significant active member, it takes time for us to find our footing and fill in the holes of what that person used to do and where that person used to sit. When a person or committee doesn’t function properly, it takes time for the system to absorb the absence and restore health and balance. Whether it is just a simple comment, or a repeated behavior, or the absence of a formerly functional member, it may take years for the body to restore its health and wholeness.

But on the other hand, one small good thing has a ripple effect that enlivens our larger church. The first square dance we had in 2016 remains a great example. No one knew what to expect, but we found an unexpected abundance on the night of the dance – an abundance of food and volunteers and visitors and smiles and laughter. Sweet Hollow had a glow for weeks afterward. People were all smiles and wondered, “can you believe it?! wasn’t it fun?!” The square dance raised several thousand dollars (a wonderful gift!), but it also raised our morale and creativity (a priceless gift!).

Part of the lesson here is in trust. Trust the parts of the body to do their jobs well. Trust the parts that are like yours, and trust the parts that work in very different ways from yours. Trust all of the members to seek the body’s health. Trust our committees to do their best work. Trust our officers to care for the church. Trust. We are all working for our common good – for the good of the whole.

Then celebrate when we achieve small and large successes -- even when (and especially when) the success is due to one particular part or member. Their victory is our victory. Their success is our shared success. If you didn’t help with the square dance, if you don’t teach Sunday School, if you aren’t pledging now, you can still rejoice for the honor God has given those working members who are bringing success to our Sweet Hollow body.

As we hold our annual meeting in a few minutes, come into this time and space with trust. Trust that the committees and church officers faithfully did their work last year. Trust in all of the forums and committee meetings and conversations and work we shared these last months. Trust the process to see our common good. Then celebrate the good work achieved, the mountains climbed, and the path before us. Thanks be to God for the gift of this body of Christ. May we honor this invitation with our servant heart and helping hands. Amen.