

“EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE A CAT”

January 18, 2025 I Corinthians 12:12-20

Benjamin Sherman Crothers, better known as **Scatman Crothers**, was an American actor and musician. He is known for playing **Louie the Garbage Man** on the TV show **Chico and the Man**. He was in several movies, sang and played guitar, went on USO tours with Bob Hope, and was a prolific voice actor for TV shows and movies. Scatman had a very unique gravely voice that stood out among character actors.

In 1970 Disney put that voice to use in their Musical Movie, **The Aristocats**. Scatman plays the leader of a gang of jazz-playing alley cats. He delivered the movie’s best number by singing, “**Everybody wants to be a Cat**”. The Refrain is:

**Yes, everybody wants to be a cat
Because a cat's the only cat who knows where it's at
When playin' jazz you always has a welcome mat
'Cause everybody digs a swinging cat.**

The song promotes the idea that everybody is envious of cats, especially jazz-playing cats. They are the ones in the know. They are the ones who define what is cool. They are in a class by themselves. Everybody wants to be a cat is a fun song, the only problem is not everyone is a cat. They are but one creature among the thousands, actually millions if you count insects, on the planet. Thinking that the rest of the creatures should be like cats is somewhat egotistical.

Now I know this is only an animated movie, but that attitude was one of the problems in the Corinthian Church. Certain folks were having a

superiority complex. They thought they had the best gifts, the most important talents, the insider spiritual knowledge, and that everyone should look up to them. As you can imagine this was causing divisions, hard feelings, and spiteful behavior. The Apostle Paul was afraid the church would tear itself apart. In response, he writes this letter the Church calls I Corinthians.

On our Presbyterian Calendar this week you will find the following designated days: **Ecumenical Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Building Beloved Communities, Racial and Intercultural Justice, Dismantling Structural Racism and the Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.** And why are these designated days there? Because they remind us that even after 2,000 years we still struggle with unity, understanding, acceptance, welcome, and seeing humanity in one another, and sometimes most especially in the Church. The radical call to oneness in Christ still challenges our living. Perhaps we need to hear Paul's words of unity now more than ever.

I. THE BODY OF CHRIST

Once a **minister was asked to dinner** by one of his parishioners, who he knew was not a good housekeeper. When he sat down at the table, he noticed that the dishes were the dirtiest that he had ever seen in his life.

“Were these dishes ever washed?” he asked his hostess, running his fingers over the grit and grime. She replied, **“They’re as clean as soap and water could get them.”**

He felt a bit apprehensive, but blessed the food anyway and started eating. It was really delicious and he said so, despite the dirty dishes.

When dinner was over, the hostess took the dishes outside and yelled, to her dogs **“Here Soap! Here Water!”**

I have always said it’s easy to love people when you don’t have to spend time with them. We all have weird habits, idiosyncrasies, and ways of living that drive others crazy. It doesn’t make us bad people, just different. This is to say nothing about values, life experiences, psychological, physical and mental limitations, cultural variances, family dynamics, and unresolved hurts, all of which make hanging out with one another extra challenging.

And I don’t know what God was thinking, but somewhere in the grand scheme of things, God decides I am going to take all these people with all these differences and challenges and call them my family and tell them to love one another. **Love them, Lord I’m not even sure I like some of them all that much, how am I supposed to love them?**

Well, maybe loving and living together begins by remembering what we have in common instead of how different we are. Paul writes, **“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”**

In ancient world – the body metaphor was well known and used by Greek philosophers. Unfortunately, it was often it was used to keep subordinate workers and slaves in their place. If you don’t do your job the whole body falls apart. Don’t upset the social order by rebelling against your superiors. **But Paul** takes this body imagery in a different direction. He uses it to promote the need for diversity and interdependence. He is actually urging the privileged, the dynamically gifted, the more mature members to respect and value those who are less privileged, gifted and mature.

Even more interesting, instead of saying the **body is the Church**, Paul says we are **Christ's body**. He deliberately reminds the Church that it is not a mere human organization a group of people one day decided to create, rather it was brought into being and sustained by the activity of the **Holy Spirit**. This Spirit binds believers into a living, even mystical, union with the crucified and risen Christ. We are part of the divine body of Christ which binds us as one. While there is a business aspect to the church, like any other institution, we exist for someone greater than ourselves because we are more than just ourselves. As the **body of Christ**, we are the physical manifestation of Jesus on earth. This truth has huge implications for how we be church.

A. ALL COME THROUGH THE SAME DOOR

Paul writes, “**For in the one Spirit we were ALL baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or Free, and we were ALL made to drink of one Spirit.**” In the first two verses Paul uses the word “ALL” three times. **ALL** – are members of one body...**ALL** baptized into one body...**ALL** made to drink of one Spirit. What we have in common is that we all come in through the same Christ door and enter into the same kingdom house. To become a Christian means to die to self and all the old identity markers that were used to divide people, and take on a new identity in Christ. The result of which we are made one body, regardless of one's previous background. No one can say they don't belong, nor can anyone say another does not belong who has come through the door of faith in Jesus Christ. All is inclusive.

B. ALL ARE NEEDED TO DO THE KINGDOM WORK

In the movie **Hidden Figures**, Kevin Costner confronts the bigotry of the 1960's NASA work environment by saying, "We all get to the peak together, or we don't get there at all." Everyone was need to send a person into space and safely return them.

The second result of being the body of Christ is all are needed to do the Kingdom Work. If a task needs done, God finds a people to do it. Teach, heal, build, speak, invite, sing, bake, wash the dishes, administrate, fund, create, etc... This is our glory, to be a part of the body of Christ on earth and for the kingdom to truly shine all our needed.

C. ALL ARE VALUED

I grew up in a suburb of 60,000 people. My youth was pretty much spent within the boundaries of that community. We would either walk or ride our bikes to get where we wanted to go. There were two miniature golf courses right next to each other near State Road. They were about a mile and half from my home. One sunny summer day my friends and I walked to play golf. When we were almost to our destination my sandaled foot caught a raised sidewalk and I ripped the skin off the bottom of my big toe. Of course, we still played miniature golf with my bleeding, semi-wrapped up big toe, but oh that hurt, and then I had to limp my way back home.

Isn't it amazing how a small injury affects our whole body? Even if it's just a hangnail, it distracts us, and reminds us something is amiss that needs cared for. So too with the Body of Christ. Because we are connected in the same Christ body, all are valued and to be respected, sympathized with and cared for, just like we care for our own bodies. As one body we celebrate together and we grieve together. Why? Because we love this body.

II. THE NECESSITY OF DIVERSITY

I imagine if we asked anyone to think of their least favorite body part most people could quickly narrow their choices down to three or four options. Pick your feature, but the answer is usually along the lines of either too much of this or not enough that. Not enough hair, poor vision, too tall, too round, bad at math, small feet...etc.

But if we apply the same question, who is your least favorite body part, aka person in the local church, there is no appropriate answer. In the body of Christ, the whole is defined by the diversity of all. We are not meant to be just one kind of member. We need great diversity to function properly. In fact, Paul drives this idea home when he wrote, **“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body.”** Each person is a unique combination of skills, experiences, gifting, interests, and passions because that is the way God designed his body.

Can you imagine if everyone in your church were a preacher? One is bad enough. Who would mow the lawn, bake the pies, do the finances, organize the blood drive, send the sympathy cards, decorate the sanctuary, sing in the choir, etc.

The truth is we don't need to create diversity; we already have it. We just need to discover and release it. And perhaps that is the real problem. It's not that there aren't a variety of gifts and people, but that we haven't recognized, developed, and mobilized them.

Who are your artists and are they decorating the walls of the church? Who are those with gifts of hospitality and why isn't hosting and cooking as important as preaching? Who are those with gifts of mercy and influence with the lost? Kick them off your church committees and release them to serve the church outside her walls. Like Marcus Buckingham says in his book, *The One Thing You Need to Know* Find out what you don't like doing and stop doing it!

Instead, accept gratefully whatever gifts God has given and use them to the benefit of the community.

Robert M. Bowman tells the story of Back in 1832, a young frontiersman in the U.S. Army went to war against the Fox and Sauk Indigenous peoples in what was known as the Black Hawk war At the beginning of the war, this young man was a captain. Now war is a terrible thing. But there is one thing about it that soldiers love — promotions. If you go to war and survive, you were pretty well assured a rapid rise through the ranks.

Sure enough, by the end of the war, this young man was no longer a captain, he was a private. Now, how a soldier can go from captain to private without committing treason is beyond me, but he did. He was undoubtedly the worst soldier in history. As a military officer, he was an abject failure, for his fall through the ranks didn't end until he was on the very bottom.

Can you imagine the humiliation he must have suffered? Well, at war's end, this skinny, awkward, funny-looking young man looked for other things to do. Eventually, he found his niche, and even achieved a measure of success. His name was **Abraham Lincoln**.

The moral of this story is that just because you're a failure at one thing, that doesn't mean you're going to be a failure at everything. Don't be discouraged, God has a job for you in his body. There are different people who have different gifts. No one child of God can do it all or be it all. But, Paul says, we all can do something, the way only we can do it! We are the body of Christ together. We need each other and we belong together, even if you are just a big toe. **Amen.**

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley
Sunday, January 18, 2025
Second Scripture Lesson

I Corinthians 12:12-20

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

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

15 If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.

16 And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

19 If all were a single member, where would the body be?

20 As it is, there are many members yet one body.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.