

“Indispensable”  
a sermon by Kyndall Rae Rothaus  
concerning 1 Corinthians 12:12-31  
for Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco  
on February 3, 2019

The Apostle Paul says the very member you think unnecessary is, in fact, indispensable. Now, none of us would go around saying, “So-and-so seems dispensable to me,” but even though we might not say it, it’s possible we’ve thought it, or even if we don’t consciously think it, maybe we treat certain people as more dispensable than others. Maybe it’s in how much or how little attention we pay to them. Maybe it’s in the way we talk about them when they aren’t around.

It’s somewhat human nature to categorize and rank people. Even the most generous helpers among us might rank who is neediest and worthy of their help, and create a hierarchy that way. Helper up here; the helped one down here. Sometimes helping churches are the worst, because in order to always be the helper, you can never need the help. Meaning you must maintain the illusion of perfect. You must remain above the normal grind of human existence, which most of us attempt to do on occasion and of course this is ridiculous. It’s as if the hand were to say to the head, “I’m so glad you’re here so I’ll have something to scratch.” The hand has forgotten that the head has a purpose of its own; that it isn’t just there for the hand to help. Sometimes we helper churches work so hard to mend people we forget they are people, not projects, and that they— whoever they are—have something to offer just as much as we do.

Paul says if you think someone in the body of Christ is lesser than you, think twice . . . because the first thought was wrong. Or if you think you are an insignificant member for whatever reason, think twice. You are of immeasurable worth. You cannot say that just because you aren’t like such and such person, you don’t belong to the body. Nonsense. You belong. And so does your neighbor. And so does the baby babbling in the back. So does the new guy and so does the Alzheimer’s patient. Everyone belongs. There is no one to whom the church says, “We don’t really need you.”

That is, when the church is functioning at its best as the body of Christ, no one is discounted or dismissed. No one is dispensable. But we all know, and many of us know by experience, that in practice the church often gets it wrong. Some of you were cut out and cut off from other churches, and so now you are here, finding your home. Some of you are here, wishing you were home, but still feeling on the outside, like you don’t quite belong, even here. Some of you have been deeply wounded by churches that did not accept you into the club. Some of you are still waiting to find out: Will they accept me here? It’s difficult being a foot at a church where hands are popular, for example. Or try being an eyeball when noses and ears are all the rage. Sometimes no matter where you go, you stick out like a sore thumb, even if you’re actually just a harmless little pinkie finger.

The point is: bodies are difficult. When everything operates smoothly as it is supposed to, the body is a beautiful thing. But if you’ve ever had a body that didn’t operate smoothly all the time, it can be a real pain.

So how, as a church, can we get it right? Like, I really don't want to be yet another church that hurts and discards people, am I right? We've got enough of those churches. Let's not add to the collective pain. Let's be unique. Let's be a body that heals.

The thing is: bodies are human. Church bodies are made up of human bodies and inevitably humans fail us. So we can start healing by setting aside perfection as a goal. Perfection only happens when you are dead so stop trying to get there. We want to be a healing—active verb—body, not a healed—past tense—one. Sorry to break it to you: this church is never going to be perfect. Lake Shore will disappoint you. Some of you are like, “Yeah, I know that already. Next point?” But I think it is important to name it out loud, that perfection is not our goal. This isn't about lowering your expectation as if to say, “Fine, I'll belong to a C minus church if God really wants me to.” It's about setting our expectations in the right direction. The question is not: “Did we get it right? Did we get it right? Did we get it right?” The question is: Do we know how to practice repentance when we get it wrong? The question is not: Did we keep the tithers happy? The question is: Have we delighted in God? In what ways does God delight in us? The question isn't: Whose fault is it that things aren't going the way I like? The question is: Who has God brought through these doors for me to learn from and love?

I mentioned in my last sermon that the main problem for the church in Corinth was a socio-economic one. The wealthy were being valued over the poor. For the church in Corinth, the “weaker” members probably didn't give as much money, and they didn't possess any of the “cool” spiritual gifts like, I don't know, *preaching* (just to pick a random gift). Seriously though, these people, these “weaker members” couldn't speak in tongues, couldn't even interpret them, the losers. But Paul has the utmost regard for them, and so, he says, should you.

Who, I wonder, are the weaker, poorer members among us? Usually I wouldn't name names from the pulpit, but I was thinking about it and truthfully two people did come to mind because financially speaking they didn't have a lot to contribute to us when they were alive. I thought of Linda Olson who just passed away, and I thought of Deborah Harris. I think I can name them as two people who any church might have underestimated *if* you judged according to their tithing record. Two people who lived paycheck to paycheck. Two people whose ill health greatly impaired their level of participation. Two people who had a lot of needs. But as many of you know—Deborah's final gift to Lake Shore was a significant portion of her wrongful death settlement, which ended up being the single largest financial gift Lake Shore has ever received. But of course, there is so much more gift to these two women than money. Think of Deborah's poetry and songs, for those of you who knew her. One of my all time favorite, most sacred Lake Shore memories is that month before she died when members of the Church of Christ youth group she had led in her younger years all came to Lake Shore to sing with her. Now old enough to have teenagers of their own, people drove in from around Texas to be here and sing because Deborah's impact on their life was that strong. And when they sang together I was transported to a different place, a holy place, a place you don't get to visit just any ole day.

And I think of Linda, how she connected with our youth group. After they went on a poverty simulation, Linda came and talked to them about real life poverty. She put a name and a face to what was before just a concept. I still remember going with the youth to paint Linda's house. She

insisted on a red front door, and if you knew Linda, a red door was no surprise. The purple hair did surprise me a little, I'll admit, but maybe that was before I really knew her.

Of course, it's easy to remember people after they are gone. What I am really asking you, Church—what Paul is really asking—is who is alive right now but you've missed them? For example, the little people. The children here are a sheer delight, I tell you. Do you know each of their names? When was the last time you paused—I mean really paused—to have a serious conversation about Legos? If you haven't had one lately, you might be missing out on part of Christ's body.

Who here do you not know yet? Who haven't you had in your home? Whose idea did you dismiss without really listening? The only way people know they are welcome here is if *we* welcome them. Not just from up here but down there. The thing about being Christ's body is—we are all he's got. It's up to us to do the loving, the welcoming, the healing, and repairing. Remember that quote from Teresa of Avila that we've used before? “Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.”

Or, if the Apostle Paul were to say it, it would be: “Christ has no body but us, no hands, no feet on earth but you and me. We are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. We are the feet with which he walks to do good, we are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. We are the hands, we are the feet, we are the eyes, we are his body.”

O sweet body of Christ, to the best of our ability, let us value each member, honor each member, notice each member, care for each member. Sometimes you have to start by valuing and caring for yourself, because if you miss that step, you won't be good at much else. It is true that we are going to make mistakes and we are going to get hurt, but because we are irrevocably tied to the love of Christ, we can be a healing body, one that heals and heals and heals again. Active verb. Active body. O Christ, infuse our body with your loving, healing powers. Amen.