

“All Together Now” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 23, 2022

- I. **1 Corinthians 12:14** – “For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”
- II. **Christianity is not an individual experience.**
 - a. God created us to work together for the common good, and for His purposes.
 - b. I’ve said it many times, but our American individualism and independence is more worldly than godly.
 - c. I can’t go to far with an illustration like this, but Christianity is like football...
 - i. I know, I know, it’s the playoffs and I have football on my mind... but when you think about all the parts that have to come together to win – individualism and independence do not help the team, they hurt it.
 - ii. Every person on the field has an assignment that works with the other guys – and if one person fails, the whole game or even season can be lost.
 - iii. Each position is set up for the person with the best skills and size – offensive linemen usually weigh over 300 pounds, while running backs might be 220.
 - iv. The quarterback calls plays and carries a heavy load, but can’t do anything without a group of offensive linemen, receivers and backs to get everything done.
 - v. Yet, have you ever seen a team that has a ton of talent go nowhere?
 1. They have the best of everything, and individuals don’t come together... they don’t mesh to be successful.
 - d. I read an article about a study that was done by a guy named Peter Silman, who studied the differences between two groups of people – kindergartners and elite university business students.
 - i. The project was pretty simple... he put them in groups of four and gave them 20 pieces of hard spaghetti, 3 feet of tape, 3 feet of string... and a marshmallow.
 1. The only rule, the marshmallow had to end up on top.
 - ii. The business students spent a lot of time planning and assigning roles.
 - iii. On the other hand, the kindergartners jumped right in... trying, failing, trying again...
 - iv. The author writes, “We presume skilled individuals will combine to produce skilled performance...” But this assumption is wrong.
 1. In dozens of trials, the kindergartners built structures that averaged 26 inches tall, while the business school students built structures that averaged less than 10 inches.

- v. We look at these smart college students and with all their skill and brains, they couldn't produce what 5 and 6-year-olds could.
 - 1. That's because the individual skills don't matter as much as the interaction.
 - 2. The kindergartners produced a better outcome not because they were more intelligent, but because they worked in a smarter way.
 - 3. The author concludes, "They are tapping into a simple and powerful method in which a group of ordinary people can create a performance far beyond the sum of their parts."¹
- e. No matter what your skill and talent level is, a team that works together can make big things happen for God.

III. **Paul's letter to the church in Corinth highlights unity.**

- a. Too many of the Corinthian members had fallen for the "who's the greatest?" problem.
- b. They had all kinds of measures to see whether a person was worthy or able to be in certain positions of authority – and much of the time it had to do with worldly standards.
 - i. Wealth, political power, beauty, careers, and popularity all played a part in the respect and positions people had in the church.
- c. Paul was addressing all kinds of problems with pride and favoritism...
 - i. It was like a football team with great talent and potential, but they were so focused on themselves that they couldn't see the bigger picture of God's kingdom.
- d. So Paul uses this great visual of the human body, with all the parts coming together as one cohesive unit – where the individual pieces cannot decide to go their separate ways.
 - i. Sure, the heart is important, but what if the kidneys decided they don't like their job anymore and want to be hearts?
 - ii. Of course lungs are needed, but what if they decided to become a hand?
 - iii. What if the hands decided to just go off on their own... how far would they get without a heart, a brain, and all the rest of the connections?
- e. It may sound elementary, but sometimes it's the simple examples that work the best – and each part of the body of Christ is important!

IV. **Many Christians believe that only certain roles have importance.**

- a. Even though God says over and over again that ALL Christians have an important role in the kingdom, many of us still believe that what we do is less than others.
 - i. We see readers or bible study teachers... maybe singers or musicians... we see preachers or elders... and we think that's the important stuff – and I'm not talented like that.

- ii. But God gives every one of His children unique talents and abilities that make a difference!
 - b. You are like a fingerprint... no one else is made up like you when it comes to your background, experiences, personality, knowledge, talents... and trust in the Lord.
 - i. And if you say you are not able to do anything for God's kingdom, you miss the point that you are part of something much bigger that fills in the gaps where you are unable.
 - c. So some people are so prideful they think they are the best and don't need anyone – and others are so critical of themselves that they don't see how they can be of service with others...
 - i. However, remember that every person needs others in an interdependent way... we need each other to complete the things God has for us to do in this world as we await the redemption of our Savior Jesus.
- V. **Pride and sin separate us**, but Jesus brings us together for great things.
 - a. God's Word and promises are true – just as we read in the Gospel lesson today as Jesus announces that the prophecies of old are fulfilled in His coming into the world.
 - b. The promise He makes and carries through with is to make people into “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)
 - c. We become God's own people whenever we come to faith in Jesus...and that means all the work He did – from birth in the lowest of places to death in the lowest of places... in a garbage dump – all that was for you.
 - i. He redeemed you and brought you to wholeness so that you might have the freedom to be a child of God and a part of the body of Christ
 - ii. All the gifts and grace are yours – and that includes the Holy Spirit!
 - d. You see, the Holy Spirit came to us through faith, just as Jesus promised, and so God makes us His holy temple. (1 Corinthians 6:19)
 - i. The power of God in us isn't for personal gain or prideful intentions... the power of God in us always reflects His love back to Him and shines out onto those around us.
 - e. Isn't that really the basis for our embracing our part of the body of Christ?
 - i. It's a response of love for God's endless grace and care – that He would redeem and restore us – even when we deserved nothing.
- VI. **God is always pulling us together**...
 - a. He wants us to reflect His love by sharing it... meshing with each other in humility as a holy team... each one doing the part we were made to do before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 2:10).

- b. We are unique... we are loved... we are all important in God's eyes...and... we are together.
- c. The time is now – embrace your place in the body of Christ as God intends – using your gifts for the common good.
- d. So, Christianity is definitely not an individual experience, because it's all about the many parts of the body all together doing great things for God. Amen.

¹ Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code* (Bantam, 2018), pp. xv-xvii.