

The Message for April 22, 2012**1 Corinthians 12:14-27*****In... Through Community*****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

In the late 1800's William Randolph Hearst was a very rich and powerful man. He owned the world's most influential newspaper. He was also an avid art collector and loved beautiful paintings. One day, Mr. Hearst saw a picture of two beautiful works of art, and decided that he must have them for his personal collection. He summoned a staff member to find out where those two paintings were located and to purchase them, regardless of the cost.

The staff person spent weeks traveling, writing letters, and making phone calls to locate these two paintings. He found them in a warehouse on the other side of the same city where Hearst operated his newspaper. Hearst was filled with anticipation as he was led to the warehouse where the paintings were located. When they arrived at the warehouse, Hearst was confused.

"This is where the paintings are located?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," responded the staff member. "Is something wrong?"

"Well, sort of," said Hearst, "I already own this warehouse and everything in it. Those paintings have been mine all along!"

Have you ever felt like you were a nobody, that you're not important, that you might never amount to anything? When we feel that way, it's easy to look with envy at other people who are more talented, more gifted, or better off than we are only to feel even worse about ourselves.

When that happens it's probably because we haven't checked out the "paintings in the warehouse." We all have paintings in the warehouse. God has given each one of us talents and abilities and skills that we probably don't even realize we have. The key is to discover them and share them for God's glory in and through the church.

Paul's letter to the church in Corinth gives us some direction in how to be the church – to discover all the paintings in this warehouse and use them for building up the body of Christ with peace.

In Paul's day, Corinth was a major city with a wealthy sea port. The people living there had a reputation for being an unruly, hard-drinking, and a rather sexually promiscuous bunch. Paul planted a church there bringing the good news of God's grace to that ragtag bunch of cantankerous people in Corinth. Many people responded and participated in that church bringing their less than stellar reputations right along with them.

The church in Corinth had developed a reputation. Every church does...

Perhaps you've noticed that when people become involved in the church we don't instantly lose all of our bad habits and rough edges and become perfect people. It takes time. We grow into this new identity and new purpose – daily. It's a daily, life-long journey that involves peace, and patience, and understanding.

That's why we often begin worship by saying – *whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey of faith you are welcome here*. This journey of faith in community together is a struggle. There isn't always peace and unity. Being the church can get messy sometimes.

That happened to be the case with the church in Corinth. Paul spent a year and a half with this church, teaching them about God and what God had done for them in Christ, and how they are to live as God's people. Once established Paul moved on to go plant more churches. He was the world's first church planter.

In time the church in Corinth began to divide into factions, arguing with one another over trivial things. They envied each other's spiritual gifts and competed for power according to one's talents. Things were not going well in that church. They began to sue one another, dragging one another into the courts, and making the church look like a bunch of cantankerous two-year-olds. You know how a two-year-old can act – everything is mine, mine, mine. Can you imagine a church full of two-year-olds?

Naturally, this concerned Paul, so he wrote the church a letter, actually two letters. We know them as first and second Corinthians.

I find it interesting how Paul addressed the divisiveness in the church. He doesn't scold them. He doesn't give them five steps to a highly effective community. No, Paul begins by telling them who they are and what God has done for them. By their baptism he calls them the body of Christ. What an awesome image. The church is the body of Christ. Thirty times Paul uses this image in his letters. It's a great metaphor for us to consider.

By calling the church the body of Christ Paul gives them a new reputation to guide them accordingly. He doesn't say, "do this" he says, "be this." Be the body of Christ. What does it mean to be the body of Christ? Four things:

1. Every member of the body shares the same DNA. Every cell in your body has the same DNA. DNA carries the generic instructions for developing and directing life in the body. The DNA in the body of the church is the grace of God. God's grace develops and directs our life together.

As we grow in God's grace we see and we behave differently towards one another. We make decisions based on what's best for the entire body, not on what is best for any one individual in it.

2. We are all different. Look around we all have different talents, and abilities, and skills to share. Many of them are like Hearst's paintings in the warehouse. We have talents, abilities, and skills to share but we don't know it. Each one of us brings something different and unique to the body.

Boredom and burnout are the two illnesses that plague the church. So I invite you to see that every person is a gift from God and on assignment from God. There is a place for you in the body of Christ.

3. We move in the same direction together. If your left foot wanted to go one way and your right foot wanted to go another way you'd have a serious problem, wouldn't you? If I tried to do that, I would end up doing a split. Then I would be in serious trouble. The same thing happens in the body of Christ.

We work together as a team as we move into the future. And since Jesus is the head of this body we listen to him because he decides the direction and the pace for us to go. With Jesus leading the way there is never boredom or burnout.

4. When one hurts we all hurt – when one rejoices we all rejoice. We're in this life together and no one is more important or less important. We're all important.

It amazes me how much ministry goes on in and through this church without me. We are all ministers in this body. I have a part to play and so do you. We are all part of the same body. If we all did one thing according to our gifts or talents this body would be all the better for it.

When I look around and see all the people and the variety of ministries happening in this place of Peace, I see the body of Christ reflecting the glory of God with a brighter future ahead us. What do you see? Amen.