**Sermon 4/28/19**

**1st Corinthians 12:12-31**

In March of 1981, President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr.

He was in the hospital for several weeks.

Although Reagan was the nation’s chief executive,

his hospitalization had little impact on the nation’s activity.

The Government continued on.

Also in 1981, the garbage collectors of New York City went on a 17-day strike.

Maneuvering around the piles of garbage was inconvenient and increasingly

difficult.

The mounds of decaying trash quickly became a health hazard.

The city was in an absolute mess.

What if, all the garbage collectors across the country

decided to go on strike at the same time?

It would literally paralyze the entire country.

So who is more important: The President, or a garbage collector?

Actually, they are both important.

Both jobs need to be done for the good of the country.

In this morning’s Scripture reading, Paul provides us with a clever anatomy lesson. By comparing members of the church of Christ, to parts of a human body,

he neatly explains two complementary truths

which the Corinthians had failed to comprehend.

Any part of a body, such as an eye or a foot,

makes a valuable contribution to the whole body.

Whenever a single member is missing, the entire body suffers.

All parts must cooperate if there is to be a unified body.

Paul relied on body images to explain both the diversity and unity of God's

followers.

The body analogy fit so well, he referred to it 2 dozen times in his various letters.

It became his favorite way of portraying the church.

The body which Paul is describing is not simply one church, or one congregation.

It includes, all denominations, all Christians, in all times, and in all places,

 all working together to teach the good news, and to love and help all people.

When we do not work together, or when we do not put our gifts to work,

we miss out on the joy and satisfaction we could experience

as we see God’s will fulfilled, and peoples’ lives changed.

Our part may seem very small and unimportant.

But every part is needed.

Often those who seem very insignificant, are the ones most urgently needed.

Every member of God’s Church is needed to do God’s work throughout the world.

Years ago Dr. Henry Jessup, a faithful missionary in Syria,

was seeking financial help for the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut.

He did not feel he was making much progress in obtaining funds,

and he was becoming very discouraged and depressed.

A friend suggested he call on a certain woman.

His friend said he believed that she would help him financially.

Dr. Jessup was surprised to discover this woman lived

on the top floor of a run-down tenement house.

In response to his hesitant knock, the elderly lady welcomed him into her home.

He saw that she had been hard at work

putting bristles into the wooden backs of scrubbing brushes.

Obviously not a high-tech job, nor a high-paying one.

Eagerly she listened to his story about the Protestant College in Beirut.

When he had finished, she got up and took one of two bags from a nail on the wall. Returning to Dr. Jessup, she said, “This is the Lord's treasury.

 I am able to lay by something for Him, after I have met my needs.

Whatever is in His bag today is for you.”

She counted out thirty-seven cents into his hands.

Tears rolled down Dr. Jessup’s face,

as she told him how glad she was to be able to give it,

and she was certain the Lord would bless its use.

Then they knelt, and prayed, and thanked God together.

Dr. Jessup often told this story to others and mentioned how great the gift was;

not so much in the amount of the money,

but in this woman’s faith that God can use and bless every gift we give him.

When he left this wonderful woman,

his doubts and depression were gone, replaced with peace and joy,

and he was confident God’s work would be accomplished.

The smallest gifts are often the most important.

Not long after the I.Q. test was developed, several studies were conducted

 to find out how different groups of people scored on the test.

The test was administered to people around the world:

men and women, young and old, rich and poor,

and many ethnic groups as well.

The I.Q. test was given to a group of Hopi Indians.

When the Hopi received the test, they immediately started to ask each other

questions and to compare their answers.

The instructor saw this happening, and quickly intervened,

telling them that they each had to take the test alone.

He told them “You are not permitted to help each other

or to share your answers among yourselves”.

When the Hopi heard this, they were outraged and refused to take the test, saying:

“It is not important that I am smarter than my brother or sister,

or that my brother or sister is smarter than me.

It is only important what we can accomplish together!”

The Hopi Indians knew the Christian life is not about competition but about

cooperation.

Often what we do for God individually is not so important.

It is not important if someone seems to be doing a big job,

or what appears to be a very small task.

It is what we accomplish all together which is important.

Together we can do amazing things.

Herman Ostry's barn floor was under 30 inches of water because of

heavy rains and a rising creek.

In desperation, The Bruno, Nebraska, farmer invited a few friends to a barn raising.

He needed to move his entire 17,000-pound barn

to a new foundation more than 150 feet away.

His son Mike devised a lattice work of steel tubing.

He nailed, bolted, and welded it on the inside and the outside of the barn.

Hundreds of handles were attached.

After one practice lift, 344 volunteers slowly walked the barn

up a slight incline, each carrying less than 50 pounds.

In just 30 minutes, the barn was on its new foundation, and was high and dry.

The body of Christ can accomplish great things when we work together.

We need each other, to encourage one another, to build each other up.

We need everyone’s opinions, suggestions, and actions, to do God’s work.

If we all work together, imagine what God can accomplish through us.

At his church one morning, a Pastor encountered

a former Hells' Angel, named Jim as he got off of the elevator.

He was about six foot four, at least 250 pounds,

and he wore cut-off jeans and a sweatshirt.

Jim had many fascinating tattoos and a scruffy beard.

As they walked down the hall together, Jim told the Pastor

he was going to his first ministry meeting, and he was really nervous.

The Pastor answered, “Nervous? How come you're nervous?”

Jim replied, “Pastor Miles, you always encourage us to do something,

so I figured I ought to do something. I want to serve the Lord.”

The church has over a hundred outreach ministries, so Pastor Miles asked him,

 “What's the ministry you're joining?”

With a deep sigh, he responded, “The knitting ministry.”

Then he added, “Well, actually, I don't knit, I crochet.”

Here's this huge guy who looks like he could be an NFL tackle,

and he's nervous about joining a ministry

which makes blankets and hats for hospitalized children.

Curious, the Pastor asked him, “Where did you learn how to crochet?”

“I was in the Hell's Angels for 12 years,” Jim answered.

“I learned to crochet in prison. I know it's the one thing I can do for the Lord.”

Just then the lady who heads up the knitting ministry walked toward them.

She gave the Pastor a quick hello,

then turned to the former Hell’s Angel and asked, “Are you Jim?”

As he nodded, she gave him a big grin and took his hand,

and they went down the hall together.

Every gift matters.

 Everyone matters.

 Every life matters.

 And every gift we give to God makes a difference.

We put food into our bodies, which converts it into energy,

so we can do the work that needed to be done.

Feasting on the word of God, converts into his work,

 So his will can be done throughout the world.

And what a difference it makes.

AMEN