

## **The Sign of a Good Team**

[Text - I Corinthians 12:4-14]

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Someone once said that the difference between a pastor and a layperson, is that a pastor is paid to do good, but a layperson is good-for-nothing. I think that's funny; primarily, because it is so far from the truth. Many of the hardest working, most dedicated members of any congregation, are the non-clergy. However, some people outside of the Church, and even within, don't quite get this. They think that if a congregation needs something done, especially if it has any kind of "spiritual" dimension, then "This is a job for *Super-Pastor!*" After all, it's the pastor who has received that "higher calling". He should be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, or bend steel with her bare hands. [Or at least know how to un-jam the copier!] Endowed with tremendously powerful theological training and an X-ray visionary insight, the pastor *must* be good at doing all kinds of church-y stuff. After all, that's what the pastor is paid to do!

Fortunately, you members of Brecksville United Church of Christ, have a much clearer and down-to-earth understanding of what it means to be called to ministry. Through our Baptism into the Body of Christ, and through our BUCC Covenant to join together as members of Christ's Body, we *all* of us have been called and empowered to serve within the Church. As pastor, my primary call centers on proclaiming the *Gospel* - the Good News of Jesus Christ; and on administering the Sacraments. And the only time I have a "higher" calling than anyone else, is when I'm called-on to climb-up a ladder and drape our Cross for Holy Week.

Each one of us, wherever we may be in our faith journey, has received a “higher calling.” During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther helped remind Church members that we are all an integral part of “The Priesthood of Believers.” Luther maintained that regardless of one’s vocation, when people live their lives or do their jobs in ways that reflect Christ’s compassion, they are performing their “priestly” duties. And as members of the Church, each one of us is called and gifted, so that *together* we can use our gifts and talents and resources to advance Christ’s highest calling: to lift-up the lowly and the oppressed; to welcome the lonely and the lost; to encourage and inspire one another, as we seek to serve and help save a broken and hurting world.

In a letter to the Christian community at Corinth Greece, Saint Paul reminds that 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church, that while there are a variety of spiritual gifts, “It is the same God who initiates all of them in each person”; and that a “manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one, for the good of all!” Apparently, some of those 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, like some 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, think and act as if their unique, lofty spiritual gifts entitle them to look down-their-noses at the gifts and calling of others. So Paul emphatically, yet eloquently explains to them - and to us - the essential purpose of **every** gift we have been given.

Paul writes, “If I speak in the tongues of mortals or of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Love is patient and kind, it is not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude.... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

When our own high regard for our personal gifts or calling, leads us to a place of false pride or a sense of spiritual superiority, we *will* eventually fall and fail. However, when you and I use our God-

given gifts to lovingly build-up and support one another, we simply cannot fail. *Love never fails!* Therefore, as long as you and I continue to walk and work together in our ministry of lovingly welcoming and serving others, we *will* faithfully fulfill Christ's call and mission.

Friday, as I was visiting my daughters and grandchildren in Columbus, Christine asked me, "How are things at the church?" With this particular sermon on my mind, I responded, "Absolutely fantastic!" Now I realize, that we do have another projected deficit budget; that our building [like our pastor] is starting to show its age; and that there will always be more that we can do, and greater ministries for us to envision and implement. Yet I firmly believe that you and I will continue to do amazing things through Christ who strengthens us, through the Spirit who inspires us, and through that Divine Love which holds us together as a Family of Faith.

So...will we have differing ideas about how to best use our time, talents, and resources; or what to do with that crumbling house back there? Sure we will! That's one of the hallmarks of a healthy congregation - to welcome diversity and to encourage a wide range of ideas, opinions, and methodologies. Will I, or you, disappoint one another from time to time? Probably so. That's part of our being human; and it's also part of our being a community that practices forgiveness and reconciliation. Through it all, we *will* move forward together with our stated mission of "Loving, Serving, and Accepting All People with God's Life-Changing power!" Because this is the "higher calling" to which each of us have dedicated our lives, and the life of this church.

At the close of this morning's worship, as we join hands and invoke a parting word of blessing, we will leave our circle open at the door, to symbolize our mutual commitment to intentionally

invite and warmly welcome others to join us in this remarkable community of faith:

To experience the richness of our diversity;

To share the strength of our unity;

And to celebrate the joy of our love for God and for one another.

So, "How are things at the church?" Absolutely fantastic! And for that, I thank God...and I thank each of you!