

*Psalm 19*

*1 Corinthians 12:12-31a*

Our scripture passage this morning brings many thoughts to mind, one being a Disney-like movie using humor to teach a really beautiful lesson. Picture it: our protagonist's mentor is trying to teach our wavering hero that she cannot fight the battle alone, she's going to need help. But our hero isn't listening of course, and keeps going on about "I'm the one, it's up to me, I alone..." etc. etc. The mentor, frustrated by the hero, then moves into a funny yet poignant song about bodies and community and how we're all to work together to get the "thing" done. It's bright, it's colorful, it's funny, it's like the training montage from Hercules, if Hercules recognized he needed help to save Olympus. So our hero finally wakes up to the fact that asking others for help is not a bad thing. She realizes she has gifts and talents, and her friends also have gifts to offer.

Whether you see this passage with the same "Disney-esque" humor that I do, Paul was using a comical metaphor to get the Corinthians attention and draw them towards a conclusion that they may not have expected, which is that we are all equally a part of God's community, and all have gifts to bring to this community, whether we see them yet or not.

Now I'm not going to take us down the path of what individual gifts we may have to bring to First Pres and the community here, not because it's not important, but because I already see you all doing this work. I see you all embracing your roles as elders, deacons, Stephen Ministers, chairing committees, sitting on committees, writing care cards, baking cookies, and all of the other wonderful work that goes in this church. I could literally go on for 15 minutes listing all of the activities that go on here that you all do. Whether you have grown up in this church or are finding this community for the first time, I see you all recognizing your gifts that you bring and using those within this congregation. It is truly beautiful and amazing work, and I want to applaud and acknowledge that work.

Buuuuuuut I also want us to start thinking bigger. You see, we're doing the body of Christ thing pretty well here, but our church is part of yet another larger body of Christ. Bear with me for a moment, we're going to take a mini-dive into the structure of the PC(USA). So we're going to start at the smallest and work our way out to the largest structure. First, we have our individual churches with the governing body as the session. These are the people you elect as ruling elders who help the church run and function, etc. Our next structure is the Presbytery; we are part of Detroit Presbytery. Each Presbytery is made up of individual churches that are all somewhat geographically near each other so they're able to be this regional body together. Next, we have our Synod! We are part of the Synod of the Covenant. The Synod is an even BIGGER regional body that is made up of a group of Presbytery's that are all somewhat geographically near each other. And then finally we have our General Assembly, which covers all of PC(USA), all of the synods together which are all of the Presbyteries together, which are all of the churches together. You can think about our denominational structure like a layered cake that

slowly gets a little bigger and wider with each new level. The individual church and session are the base, then the Presbytery, then the Synod, then our General Assembly as the whipped cream topping. Now, that's a lot to think about, so I'm going to pull us back for a moment to the Presbytery level.

What would it look like for the individual churches in the Detroit Presbytery to come together and recognize one another as individual members of the one body of Christ? If that is still too much to think about, we can take another step back and think about individual churches in Ann Arbor alone, what would it look like to recognize each other as individual members of the one Ann Arbor body of Christ?

Because you see, Paul isn't just reaching out to the Corinthians to tell them, "hey, y'all, and y'all alone are THE ONE body of Christ." No, Paul uses very similar language that he uses to talk to the Galatians and Colossians and everyone else he wrote letters to. Being called to be individual members of the one body of Christ is part of our calling coming out of our baptisms, to be part of the ONE body and ONE spirit. And that ONE body and ONE spirit extends past the walls of our church.

So let's start with one easy step in this equation. What are First Presbyterian Church's gifts that we bring as one individual member of the body of Christ? Some gifts that I see you all bringing to the wider community are your deep love and care for others who are in need. You not only deeply care for each other by bringing food and writing cards to one another, but you care for the community at large. Just recently we finished hosting the overnight shelter for some of our homeless men in Ann Arbor, we donated gifts to 80 families and foster children at Christmas so they could have a less stressful holiday together, we are currently figuring out how best we can help a refugee family resettle in Ann Arbor, just to name a few.

We also have an absolutely stunning music program here, between our choir, handbells, orchestra, children's and youth music programs, there is a ton of musical talent that we are blessed to experience each week and could be one of the blessings we bring to the body of Christ.

I encourage you to think of what gifts you possess and how you see our church embracing those gifts in a wider context. No gift is too small to bring to the collective table.

I also want to encourage you to take a step further and look at the surrounding churches in our community or Presbytery. What gifts do you see in them? What do you see them doing well that you might often think, "hey we should do that here!" As you think about our gifts and their gifts, I encourage you to think not about how we can imitate them, but come alongside them, bringing our gifts to strengthen theirs and hopefully in turn their gifts will strengthen ours. For together, we are ALL part of the ONE body of Christ.

As I think about what gifts you all have, what gifts our church has, what gifts other churches may have, I'm left thinking about the latest Disney movie *Encanto*. Yes, an actual movie this time, not just a made-up version in my head (ha ha). For those who haven't seen *Encanto*, this movie is all about the gifts that this family has been given from a miracle their Abuela had. Throughout the movie, we see each family member's gift, like Luisa's strength, Pepa's ability to control the weather, Dolores' ability to hear everything, Isabela's ability to create beautiful and perfect flowers, on and on. But when we get to the main character Mirabel, we're left to think that she doesn't have a gift like the rest of the family. And while she's not cast out of the family or shunned, there is a tension that she doesn't seem to be like the rest of the family and have a magical gift. As we move through the story, tensions build, people start to worry about losing their gifts, and just as everything is falling apart, the family realizes they all have gifts whether they are special miracle gifts or not. Even the folks of the town who did not have miracle gifts and relied heavily on this family started to realize their strengths and helped out the Madrigal

## *What are the Gifts of the Church*

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family. One of the truly many lessons this movie has to offer is one that hits at the core of our epistle lesson; that no matter how small or insignificant your gift and talent may be, everything is worthy and needed within the body of Christ.

Whether we are thinking about the story of *Encanto* or other popular stories, time and time again we see our protagonists winning when they rely on others, not just themselves. It was a team effort to get Frodo Baggins to take the one ring to Mordor, it took more than just Harry Potter to defeat Voldemort, even the Pevensie children eventually came together to rule over Narnia together.

So as we go into this week, I invite you to think about the gifts of this church and how we can bring those gifts together with other churches in Ann Arbor and the Detroit Presbytery to do even more good in the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

### **Prayer by Richard Rohr**

God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what you love infinitely and everywhere. We thank You that we can offer just this one prayer and that will be more than enough, because in reality everything and everyone is connected, and nothing stands alone. To pray for one part is really to pray for the whole, and so we do.

Help us each day to stand for love, for healing, for the good, for the diverse unity of the Body of Christ and all creation, because we know this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed, that all may be one.

We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God, we offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord. Amen.