

Many Talents

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth." ²⁷ God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.

1 Corinthians 12:12-17, 26-27 ¹² Christ is just like the human body--a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. ¹³ We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Certainly the body isn't one part but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? ¹⁶ If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. ²⁷ You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.

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You might be fairly familiar with the first chapter of Genesis. It's a story of creation, one of two that we find in Genesis. The second account begins at chapter two, verse four. Most people are more familiar with the first story and there's a good reason for that. The first chapter of Genesis is liturgy. It has rhythm and repetition. It's really meant to be read aloud and it works very well as a responsive reading. And because of the repetitive structure, the phrases tend to stick in our minds. There is a flip side to this, though. Familiar scripture can become kind of like wallpaper – it's there in plain sight and you think you know it completely. And so often, you may have overlooked some important features.

One aspect of the story that gets less thought is the goodness of diversity. God calls forth all of plant life – all of it. We're talking majestic Sequoias, stately oaks, and ramrod straight pines. We're talking about beautiful roses, fragrant bluebonnets, and bright yellow sunflowers. But we're also talking about prickly pear cactus, Johnson grass, and dandelions. And we haven't even thought about moss, fungi, and pond scum. The variety of size, appearance, and the variety in taste and edibility is staggering. To call plant life diverse is an understatement of immense proportions. And, God declared that it was good.

Now if it was up to me, the oceans would be filled with tuna, salmon, shrimp, and scallops. We could add dolphins because they're cute. God wanted more diversity than that, so we also have whales, manatees, sea cucumbers, eels, squid, and coral. And God declared that it was good!

I like humming birds, woodpeckers, indigo buntings, puffins, eagles, and storks. But God went for greater variety, so we also have cow birds, crows, buzzards, and turkeys. And God declared that all of those, and more, were good. We used to have dodo birds, but while God said they were good, we didn't see why, so we got rid of them. That seems like too much confidence in our own judgment, when you think about it. Who are we, to decide? But that's another sermon.

The wealth of variety continues on land. Some animals appear to be solid evidence that God not only likes beauty, but also has a sense of humor. Horny toads, giraffes, and duck billed platypus certainly strike us as funny looking. All in all, immense variety certainly seems to be a

great good, so far as God is concerned – and we often kind of overlook that, when we think about the first chapter of Genesis.

Another element in this liturgy of creation is that God speaks various components of our world into existence. It may not occur to us that this might be a metaphor. We're into instant gratification, so why not God, too? A huge example of how we expect instant gratification is the fast food industry. We drive around to a bunch of pictures of food. In a loud and firm voice we declare what it is we want to eat. Then we drive around the corner to a hole in the wall and our food is handed to us. If you had a guest in the car with you who came from some place so far back in the hills that they had never been to town or seen TV, they just might describe the experience as "speaking food into existence." And even though you and I know that there's more involved, we come close to instant gratification when we use the drive-through at Wendy's or when we pop something into the microwave.

This morning we're going to do a little bit of almost instant creation. In your bulletin was a piece of colored paper. I'd like for you to take that out and let's do a little construction work.

First, fold the sheet of paper in half lengthwise. Now open it back up.

Now, fold each side in half toward the center.

Fold each corner down.

Now, fold each corner over again toward the center.

Take each side and fold it in half toward the center.

Finally, at the center, lift up each side and turn the whole side inside out.

Now, if all went well, you have a paper boat! Just as an aside, I may email family this afternoon and tell them that this morning I spoke dozens of boats into existence!

Some of you may have a pretty neat looking boat. Some of you may have thought, "This is silly. I'm not going to make paper boats in worship." Some people may have gotten frustrated and given up sometime during the process. And some boats are more wrinkled than others. Some are more symmetrical. And there are various colors, as well. I'll guarantee that no two boats are alike. The point is that like the paper boats, we are each unique. Some of us have origami talent – and some don't. Me? I've been practicing all week in hopes of making something that resembles a boat. Not only are we diverse in height, age, and skin color, we're each unique in fingerprints, patterns in the iris of our eyes, DNA structure, and paper boat making ability.

Paul tells us that we are the body of Christ. It's a very helpful metaphor. It helps us understand how, even though we are all together in one body, it's not only okay, it's not only good, but it's absolutely essential that we all be different from each other - if we are to be healthy and effective as the body of Christ. If we are all eyes, we won't hear the cries of pain around us. If we are all ears, we won't smell the stench of corruption and mistreatment. If we are all the head, we won't get anywhere, lacking the feet to take us. And without arms and hands, we'll be limited in what we can accomplish when we arrive.

Just as each of us has been given eyes and ears, hands and feet, we have also each been given many talents – not just one or two, but many. Like bodies, talents need to be trained and exercised. You may be unaware of some gifts that you have until you try. Just because you make great food for fellowship events doesn't mean that you can't teach a class, sing in the choir, or serve on session. You're multi-talented and it's part of your calling and joy to uncover and use

your various gifts. You may have gifts that you think you don't want. We need to be cautious about rejecting God-given talents. That can show a lack of gratitude and appreciation for God's creative generosity - just like abuse and defilement of the earth and destruction of other forms of life shows no appreciation for God's gifts or respect for God's property. And we almost always find that using our gifts is more satisfying and fun than we expected.

Today, we'll recognize our teachers. Just as good cooks feed our bodies and facilitate good fellowship around the table, so it is that teachers feed our minds and facilitate community by their example of caring for others. By teaching the younger folks among us, teachers welcome new families with children. Teachers embody our understanding of the worth and importance of each and every person. They feed young minds with the knowledge and love of God.

Those of us who are grown up need teachers, too. Just because you've reached your full height, you don't stop eating. Why in the world would you want to stop learning? When you do that, you faith stagnates and your mind begins to die. Your faith and your mind are far too valuable to mistreat. They are gifts too wonderful to ignore. The fabulous thing that needs to be clearly proclaimed, is that when you teach, you learn more than anyone else in the room! So, I urge you to appreciate the teachers among us, partake of the spiritual food that they offer, and explore the possibility of your own talent for teaching. Think of the joy that could add to your life. Amen.

May God's blessing surround us each day
as we trust God and walk in Christ's footsteps.
May the Holy Spirit's presence within us guard and keep us from sin.
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.
And all of God's people said - AMEN.