



July 5, 2020

### Introduction

I am Kevin Fickenscher sitting in as a temporary surrogate for Rev. Deb Hanson who is doing well following her knee surgery.

### Call To Worship

Close your eyes. Focus on the now and take the moment to implore our God together, to hear our prayer, to help us.

### Invocation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A95UbOPVQKc>

Wasn't Chris' call to worship wonderful? He not only pulled us into our call to worship but also provided a focus for our discussion today. He captures the tenor of the times so much better than anything I could try to say and concludes with "What can be? What can be?" So, let us begin our celebration on this wonderful morning from our separate places by being of one body together but apart for a discussion of Our Liminal Time. I've asked my best buddy and wonderful wife - Dr. Suzanne Olbricht - to share the Gospel Lesson for today.

### Reading the Word

Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

### Message

### Prayer

Gracious God, help us to understand that our prayers are just the beginning. Give us the strength to reach out, to listen carefully, to hear the words, the pain, the anguish, the exaltations of everyone across every spectrum of society so that our prayers might become real through our action of love, outreach and support of the peace we seek for all of humankind in all places. We offer these, our prayers, as mere statements to the **ACTIONS WE INTEND TO SUPPORT** in your name. Amen

### Blessing

We hope to see you soon. Until then...be safe...keep your distance...wear a mask.

Romans 12:4-5

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.



SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY  
KEVIN FICKENSCHER

So, you might be asking yourself: Why the parts of the human body? Because we've got two doctors leading the discussion! That might seem like the reason but, it's not! The real reason is that Paul's letter to the Corinthians speaks directly to the times we are living in. It's a metaphor used by Paul to bring together the believers at the time following Jesus crucifixion in Corinth, Collasia, and Ephesia.

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And, it's a great metaphor. The human body is complex just like the church + human body = stunning creation by God. And, among the living creatures here on the face of the earth, if not the entire universe - humans have to be right up there on the chain of life - or, at least we like to think so! Right? Why? Because we are: Not animals - even though sometimes we act like it! We don't live by instinct alone and, we are in touch with the world we live in - most of the time, although in recent weeks ???

At the same time, we are "not angels - even though some of us think we are. Instead, we use our intelligence and our recognition that God is all around us. And then, some of our skills are more developed than others like using tools - sometimes in some not-so-good ways. But we can pick things up, examine them, use them to solve problems at the time when we decide. We can communicate by making sounds - even though those sounds are sometimes hurtful or spiteful. We like to think our languages of choice are unique. We can create books, we can write the Bible. But, the dolphins and some birds are pretty sophisticated in their ability to communicate but, I digress...

We can feel with our skin, can discriminate between softness, abrasiveness, hot & cold. We can see things - even though the very same object might be seen differently by each of us. We see the smiles and frowns on the faces of those we met or watch the tides going up and down along the shoreline or color of the flowers. And, we have hearing for listening wind rustling through the leaves on the trees, the music by Mozart, Johnny Cash, The Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel or your favorite musician, we hear the words that people utter in the scriptures. We can offer our thoughts to our fellow man. But, the most unique aspect of being a human is that we can consider...we can evaluate...we can ponder...we can think...or, so we think we can think...we can calculate...we can appraise. And, with all these skills, we can make decisions, make the tools, do the right thing or the wrong thing, we can take the conversation and interpret what is really being said, we can contemplate...AND we can seek more understanding through dialogue.

BUT HAVE WE DONE THESE THINGS? DO WE CONSISTENTLY CONSIDER...EVALUATE... PONDER...THINK... CALCULATE AND APPRAISE?

AND, BECAUSE OF OUR UNIQUENESS do we have some special responsibilities? I think so...to the other creatures of the world? to our creator? to one another? Father Richard Rohr: Living in “Liminal Time”. So, what’s that? “Limen” is a Latin noun for the world “threshold”. Translate = “brow”, “edge”, “portal” or “gateway”. Essence = requires us to leave one place or state and enter an entirely different place or state. So, “liminal” = passage. We are clearly in a Liminal Time.

Does that make sense to you? Going from one state to another? A long time ago we went from being hunters and gatherers to living in tribes or small groups with lots of consternation. Tribes to nations - a period of upheaval... Then the Industrial Revolution. Now, the Digital Revolution that is still not over. Going from a world with artificial lines in the sand or dirt to an interconnected world where boundaries are not so clear at all. In essence, we’re going from separation to togetherness. We are going from consumption to preservation.

Our passage - as a people, as a society, as a global community going from all-about-me to all-about-us...

AND, we need all of us - not just some of us - to be on board. Paul’s metaphor was not only sent to the Corinthians but also the Ephesians (1:22-23; 4:15-16); as well as the Colossians (1:18; 2:19). Draw your attention to the last verses where Paul says, “there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. That is the essential lesson for today - for our Liminal Time we are now experiencing. However, there are two critical elements that must be present. First, we need to LISTEN to one another as well as HEAR what we are saying. The following is a personal story, listening and hearing, about “Butch”, one of the most important influences on my life. He was very different than me. He was short, I was tall. I had long hair, he had short hair. He was self-educated and highly learned. I was attending university and was in the process of learning. He lived on the farm he grew up on. We had lost the farm I grew up on due to drought and a massive hail storm. And, he was conservative...incredibly conservative...and, he was a very successful farmer in a small community north of Grand Forks, North Dakota. And, I was a “liberal”, attending college and aspiring to be somebody... someday...somehow. His daughter was Sally, my best friend’s girlfriend. I got to know Sally, her sisters and brothers, and her Mom, Ellen Ann, and, of course, her dad, Butch. During the summer months rather than returning to Bismarck, I stayed in Grand Forks, had a job as an orderly/ambulance driver. In my free time, I liked to go to Butch and Ellen Ann’s farm. Why? There was always free food (lots), and a swimming pool. Butch and Ellen Ann treated all of us as part of the family.

Butch's perspective was totally different than mine. His was a "protected" view of the world. He grew up in the same little town in North Dakota where he learned, listened and interpreted the world based on the few hundred people he knew, who were all like him. I, on the other hand, was an aspiring, young, collegiate type whose roommate was from India, and suitemates were from Turkey. I hung out with the international students and was exposed to all sorts of languages, cultures and perspectives, some of which I understood and appreciated and others that I never fully understood. AND, like all young people of that era, I was terribly affected by the Vietnam War, the 1968 assassinations, riots, and the 1969 Kent State massacres. It seemed like tragedy occurred every day - sort of like the world today...where it is affecting younger people in the same way the 60's affected me...

Butch liked to engage discussion & debate. When you debated Butch you had to be prepared. Butch was one of the smartest people I ever knew AND not only conservative BUT really conservative. We'd sit for several hours discussing the events and news of the day in the day before 24 hour coverage by CNN, Fox and others. Butch and I did not agree on much BUT he listened to me AND I learned to listen to him. He did not simply throw back pundit comments. No, he argued about my logic, my facts, or how I was putting together my thoughts. And, occasionally, just occasionally, I would win the argument of the day. He would push from the kitchen table, look at me, smile, say, "Kevin, you've got a good point." And, then we were off to another topic.

But, he listened... He digested... He considered... He evaluated... And, he even accepted on occasion... What's the lesson of Butch? It's about TALKING TOGETHER. Coupled with LISTENING and HEARING helps to create an environment or culture of TOGETHERNESS. We are, in fact, in this world together. BUT, I've also learned that Listening and Hearing are not enough!!

There's a SECOND STEP that requires TWO OTHER CRITICAL ELEMENTS...

The First Element is to LEARN from the moment. If we have no "learning", we will have no "finding". If no "finding" we will not get to next critical/final element. What's that? It's ACTION!! Action is the necessary element.

ACTION is what James, Jesus' brother, speaks to very directly in I James Chapter 1, verses 22 - 25 when he writes: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

James' advocacy means we need to do the finding first by reading across all backgrounds, across all colors, across all generations. Furthermore, if we don't recognize that reaching out is important, the essential elements of listening and hearing that create togetherness will never fully fall into place. If we don't move beyond listening/hearing, to learning/action, there is no justice, there is no peace, there is no resolution, because we are not "doing based on what we've learned."

It is also clear that TOGETHERNESS requires us to have an intimate relationship with the members of the body - or, our fellow humans - by whom and for whom the church exists. Getting the different body parts working together is a fabulous metaphor for the life we face. "You'll have problems if the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing!" Or "That conversation ended on a sour note. Or "You can't dance if your feet don't move together."

So, what does this all mean for us...today? Because we were all sheltering in place, we all experienced the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and too many other explosions of emotion and violence across the world. But, beyond bringing everyone to the streets in despair, there has also been another surprising outcome. First, the essence of our American culture has bubbled to the top with all of its inherent differences. After all, we come from many different cultures, with different ways of thinking, with different life experiences and different philosophies of life.

We are not a cookie-cutter culture. THE DIFFERENCES WE REPRESENT ARE THE VERY FABRIC of our nation. A nation built on the notion of individual freedoms that can, if we don't listen, hear and learn, can devolve into DIVISIVENESS!

BUT, if we actually do listen, hear and learn, we can ACT TOGETHER. The right hand can work with the left hand. Our conversations can end on a high note, not a sour note. Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians because he was concerned that the spirit of partisanship was threatening the existence of the churches he had founded in Corinth. Paul wanted a world-wide, unified church, not divisions, not separateness, not estrangement. Just as the body functions most effectively when all of the parts work together, so it is for all of us. To solve problems the parts need to "collaborate" with one another. And, "col·lab·o·ra·tion" requires the act of working TOGETHER to produce or create something. If I pick up my coffee cup, I need to use my eyes to see it, my fingers to touch and feel the glass, my muscles to grasp it, my nose to smell the sweetness of dark roasted coffee, and, my mouth to taste the contents. I need my brain to be stimulated in the morning so that I can learn. I need the whole body, not just some of it. If we are going to solve racism, we need to use our eyes to see how everyone is treated. Touch others who are different than us to realize the only difference is the color of our skin, not content of our bodies. We can use our strength to prevent the abuse of others. We need our brain to think about all these facts and learn, come up with solutions that keep us together. We need the whole body, not just some of us.

Collaboration uses LISTENING and HEARING to develop UNDERSTANDING/LEARNING. BE & ACT TOGETHER... LET ME REPEAT THAT...

In fact, we are one body! But, the one body is not just us. No, the one body is everywhere. Here in our community, in neighboring communities, in our nation, across the world. The ONE BODY IS EVERYWHERE with EVERYONE - forever and always! We are TOGETHER in this world with all the people: those we know AND those we don't know, those we like AND those we don't particularly admire. From the GI Generation and Boomers to GenX and on to GenZ. We are TOGETHER: black and brown and white and any other color. We are TOGETHER regardless of our origin whether it's European, Asian, African, Latino or any other regions here on Mother Earth. In the final analysis - We are all humans TOGETHER with EVERYONE!

SO, LET ME SHARE SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

We can build our hopes not only on what we do but also on the foundation of who and what and how we are. Last week, one of the signs being carried in the protests was the following: We've come so far but we've only come so far and we've got much further to go...

So, to begin our listening and hearing that will lead to action, there's a questions I'd like to leave you with today. Here's the question: Where's the most important place for us to start our listening and hearing and learning that will lead to action? Is it in PRAYER? Is it at CHURCH? Is it at PROTESTS? Is it in discussion groups and DEBATES? Is it online? Or, is it AT THE DINNER TABLE? Or, the COMMUNAL TABLE?

My sense is that it's not one of them, It's ALL of them. Think about that for a moment...

I think the best way to come together in a communal way is to offer our prayers in silence. Let's take 10 seconds in silence before we come together for our final prayer. Let us pray in silence.