

The Cost of Staying Connected

1 Corinthians 12:12-27
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I once overheard a conversation between two bills. A \$1 bill and a \$20 bill were waiting at the Federal Reserve to retire. The \$20 bill was bragging, "I've had such a good life! I've been all over the world! I've been to foreign countries, through many slot machines in Vegas, to the nicest restaurants ... I've even been on a Caribbean Cruise!" "Wow!" said the \$1 bill. "I've had a good life too and I've been all over! I've been to the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and even the United Church of Christ!" To which the \$20 bill responded, "What's a church?"

This morning is Stewardship Sunday. For the last several weeks we have been reminded by our Stewardship Committee to begin thinking about the ways in which we can give financially to this church throughout the following year. We have been to Mount Everest, to the Atlantic Ocean, and to the early years of the Wright brothers preparing to take flight keeping our eyes focused, yet looking on the far horizon.

This church has proved to be good at that! We CAN focus on our needs for today while looking in the future. You can't make it 150 years without being able to balance both!

And although the story about the dollar bills is fun and maybe a little thought provoking, I wasn't asked to speak today on giving money to the church, I was asked to speak on Stewardship.

The word "steward" comes from the Greek word "oikonomos," "oiko" meaning, "house" and "nomos" meaning, "laws." In other words, it's referring to the management of the house or who takes care of the house.

As Christians, we are expected to be faithful stewards to our householder, God. And not just this house where we worship at 608 West 4th Street in Waterloo, Iowa, but to the creation He has given to house us in. We are not just expected to be good stewards in worship on Stewardship Sunday, but good stewards of the environment -- taking care of and preserving the earth we have been given to live in and enjoy, and good stewards of people -- our families, our fellow congregation members, our coworkers. We are expected to be good stewards of everything God has given us. In return, we have full access To what? Everything He has given us! Full access to the fullness of life!

We have an accountability to our householder and we all have to do our part to keep up the house.

As many of you know, I grew up in a house with just one brother. And by just one brother, I don't mean just one brother, I mean, one brother, no other siblings. It was a small family and when someone (mainly my brother) didn't do his chores to keep up the house of my parents, in which we were living, you noticed.

God's house is different in that there is no score. It's not about what someone does that someone else does not, and that is EXACTLY what is so neat about it. Everyone brings something else to the house that is equally important, but our differences are what make us one.

No one brings any more or any less to the body of Christ. Everyone is equally important because without each of our differences, our gifts, our talents, we wouldn't be who we are.

You have heard before, and if not, you have now heard today the scripture about being the body of Christ. I like this scripture. I have often read that and wondered, how do we do that? How do we become the body of Christ? It's simple, friends, it's not about becoming the body of Christ, instead, it's about looking to see how the body of Christ, as it already exists, allows us to relate to each other and build each other up.

This reminds me of two contemporary Christian songs that I like real well! One of them is by Audio Adrenaline, which is one of the groups that the youth from this church and I went to see in concert a few weeks ago. They have a song titled, "Hands and Feet" and in the song it asks God for us to be His hands and feet and help us to go where he sends us. The other song is by a group called Casting Crowns. They have a song called, "If We Are the Body." Let me read you the chorus of that song: "But if we are the Body, Why aren't His arms reaching? Why aren't His hands healing? Why aren't His words teaching? And if we are the Body, Why aren't His feet going? Why is His love not showing them there is a way?"

We need His arms reaching -- and we do! You saw the video today with all the arms preparing, serving, and cleaning up food at Community Meals. We need His hands for healing -- many of you have seen the quilters video last month, all of those hands paying close attention to detail to make beautiful quilts and then giving them away to those who need would otherwise not be warm during our cold months. We host a healing service in this sanctuary once a month to pray for ourselves and others in this congregation, community, and world. We need His feet going, and His words teaching, and His love showing. And I think we do all those things real well. But in order to keep it happening, we have to stay connected.

And what is the cost of staying connected? This is a common question that cell phone carriers often get asked. It is something that the more than 2.5 million Blackberry users know one answer to. "Are you connected?" We all know what that means in the wireless world of today. Our phones go with us everywhere, our computers get us online in motels, restaurants, and even in our cars! As a society, we know the cost of being connected.

I think the more important question is, "What's the cost of NOT being connected?" Any of our high school youth would be quick to tell you what that cost is. Whether it's missing out on the plans for the night or knowing the newest gossip, there is a need to stay connected. It feels like something is missing when you don't have that interaction.

But I want to challenge us to look at that in a larger sense. What is the cost of our not being connected in the body of Christ? Would we feel like something is missing without that interaction? Do we even want to think about the risk of NOT being connected to one another and working together?

We all bring, or can bring, something important to this body of Christ, something that, without you, we wouldn't be the same. But the one thing I want to remind you of is, don't ever forget, we all serve for a common good. We all do what we do because we serve an awesome, healing, loving, forgiving, grace-giving God.

Last weekend I was sitting in one of my Center/Learn classes on a subject of assessing congregations. Our instructor was talking about the church as we know it in local congregations and said, "The church lives somewhere between memory and hope." DING! As soon as I heard that, I immediately thought about the skits we had been entertained by in worship the previous weeks. The church living somewhere between memory and hope, that's exactly what the Stewardship committee's theme has been. The memory of looking back on where we have come from, it puts perspective on it all, doesn't it? And the hope, giving us direction for the future, looking onward on the far horizon.

It's my prayer this morning that you will be able to think about the memories you have of this church and dream about the future of tomorrow. Amen.