



The Trinity Pulpit



The Problem With a One-Man Band I Corinthians 12:12-31

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Her band is called “Just Kait.” It is called “Just Kait” because the band features just Kait. Kait DiBenedetto is a 17 year-old music sensation. Using technology she loops one instrument after another and creates a musical fusion that is not only astounding to listen too but also amazing to consider. Just Kait’s hit song “Sick” is featured on *MTV* as a feature song and the *E Channel* is using it for commercials. She is a teen sensation and it is only Kait. She is a one-man band or should we say one-woman band.

Just Kait is far from the other one man bands we might have witnessed in the past. You know those odd looking acts of a man with cymbals between his knees, a guitar in his hand, a tambourine around his neck and a harmonica in his mouth. Those acts are usually not very entertaining although they are amusing. As much as we might be amazed or amused by a one man band they do have their limitations. The one man band cannot break up nor can they collaborate, cooperate or experience the act of creativity that comes when you work with someone else.

It is not only in music that we find the need to share life with others so that we can create something of worth or function in a high level. I have always thought that the Army’s advertising scheme called “An Army of One” made no sense. I understand it was aimed at a generation that is independent but I have always wondered about “An Army of One.” I think when it comes to a military it is better to have a band of brothers than an army of one. I know it is just semantics, but semantics are important when you are talking about how you share life with others.

They are important in the church as well. Sometimes the church functions too much like a one-man band. Sometimes we might feel like a church of one instead of a band of believers. Sometimes a few people are playing too many roles and working independently from everyone else. When it comes to the church there is a problem with a one-man band.

That is what the Apostle Paul is reminding the Corinthians about in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians. Paul has already told them that there were many gifts which God had given the members of the church. Each gift was to be used and each gift was important. Each gift, according to Paul, had been given to each person as God intended and so there was no room for jealousy or envy. Paul continues this process of how the church is to function when using the image of the body; he reminds the church that in the church there are many parts but only one body.

The church cannot be a one-man band. Instead, we have to be a body of many parts that functions as one. Yet, we all know that we sometimes fail miserably at this in the church today. As I read this text this week, I was reminded of three things that a one-man band cannot do and I think that it informs this text. Let me share three words with you to consider as we read this text this morning.

The first word is *coexist* – a one-man band cannot coexist; yet, to coexist is really the most basic level of being church. We have all seen those bumper stickers that read “Coexist.” The sticker has religious symbols from the cross, to the Star of David to the Ying Yang symbol. The person who places

this on their car is making a statement about world religions. They are saying “You all exist so coexist.” They are not suggesting that they are all alike or have the same purpose and goals. The bumper sticker is really just an endorsement for tolerance and acceptance. I think the basic concept is that we are here on this planet with each other, so if nothing else just don’t kill one another. The word simply means to live in the same place with each other – exist together.

Let me suggest that the first step of the church is to coexist. Paul would say that there should not be any division; then, he names two categories of division that should disappear in the church. He states that we were Jews and Greeks and Slave and Free, but now we all have been baptized by the Spirit into one body. Jews and Greeks coexisted and free and slave coexisted but that was all. There were cultural, racial and socio-economic differences that divided them. Now, in the church in Corinth those same divisions were apparent. Therefore, Paul’s first instruction is to coexist.

Paul’s first argument is coexistence. The foot cannot say “Because I am a hand, I do not belong to the body or the ear cannot say because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body.” Just because the ear or the foot is not an eye or a hand they do not cease to be part of the body.

Paul is trying to begin our thinking at the basic level: no matter what we might think of ourselves or of others, when we become a Christian, we exist in the body of Christ. We coexist as Christians in the church that is a given, but just coexisting is not enough. There are problems in a church that just function by coexisting.

What are some examples of this problem of just coexisting? First, when we just then coexist then we fail to participate with the body. There are Christians who are part of the church, but they are not in fellowship with other Christians. They do not choose to join others in worship or see the need for relationships. There is a great difference between coexisting and being a participant in the body of Christ. There is a second problem with coexisting: it creates a consumer mindset where we come to church to consume religious matters, get

our fill, and use the church for our purpose, never really realizing that we are a part of the body.

The place coexisting occurs in the local church is when we decide that we will do our own thing separated from the whole. We, as an individual or a class, might say “Well, I don’t care what the rest of the congregation is doing; we are going to do this. We will just do our own thing our own way. We will exist in this place alongside the others but that is as far as it goes. We will coexist.”

Paul begins his argument for the need for unity at the basic level and that is coexistence, but he moves to what I would call cooperation. Cooperation is the intellectual understanding that we need one another. The word *cooperation* means “to assist another for the accomplishing of a common goal or purpose.” Cooperation in the church is the understanding that we need each other to reach our goals. Paul’s argument is clear. If the whole body was an eye then where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear where would the sense of smell be? If we were all the same part then where would the body be?

Paul is asking us to make a consideration of the uselessness of a body that is nothing but an eye or ear. It would no longer be a body but something grotesque and useless. Essentially, Paul is telling us just from an intellectual and logical view point we need each other. There must be cooperation. Yet, there are two attitudes that stand in the way of cooperation.

The first is jealousy or envy. The person who says “Because I am not like this person I will not participate.” Remember, the foot and the ear said “I am not part of the body because I am not a hand or eye.” When we fail to realize our importance and think that we are not needed, then we fail to participate and cooperate.

The other attitude is pride. It is bad enough to not want to be a part of the body because we don’t think we are good enough; it is even worse to refuse to cooperate with others because we don’t think they are good enough. Paul says “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,” Paul writes, “the very parts that seem to be the weakest are actually the most important.”

Paul’s argument is that there are parts of the body that are not presentable, weaker and less honorable but we treat them with great care. There are three categories Paul mentions: there are those that appear weaker; those which are not seen; those parts that everyone sees need no further recognition. For example our organs are not seen but they are indispensable. There are parts that are less honorable and these are the parts that might not be attractive, but we show them honor by giving them attention. There are parts that are private and not presentable; yet, we spend time trying to cover them and adorn them and give them special treatment for modesty’s sake.

Paul’s point is that each part is needed and just because it is not obvious does in no way diminish its importance.

The thought that since I am not this person then I am not going to participate in the church or the thought that we don’t need that person to achieve our purpose is foreign to the idea of the church. Cooperation comes when each part is considered important.

Yet, let me suggest that even cooperation is not the ultimate picture of the body of Christ. Cooperation is better than coexistence, but cooperation still has selfishness to it. It is still about achieving my purpose and my goals.

If we want an example of how cooperation fails, us all we have to do is look at Baptist life. We used to say that cooperation was so important. In fact, we called our joint mission effort “The Cooperative Program.” The concept is that local congregations choose to cooperate with others for a greater purpose such as missions and evangelism. The concept was that these two purposes were enough to keep people cooperating, but they were not. When we determined that we were different than other Baptists theologically, then Baptists began to choose not to cooperate.

In the local church, we choose to cooperate with others as long as our goal and our interests are

being addressed. Cooperation is better than coexistence, but it is still not the picture of the body of Christ.

Let’s look at another word. A one-man band cannot coexist, cooperate and it also cannot collaborate. How is collaboration different than cooperation? *Collaboration* is described as “a moment when something new is created as the result of two independent people or organizations working jointly together.”

Collaboration, in my thinking, takes us one step forward from cooperation. Cooperation is an intellectual ascent, but collaboration involves more than the intellect – it involves shared risks and the potential to create something new. Paul says “Not only should we accept our need for each other but we must take it a step forward. Not only do we need each other, but when we are the body of Christ functions as it should we are changed by the needs and the lives of others.” Notice that in the church this need of each other goes beyond intellect. Paul says “When one suffers we suffer with it and when one part is honored we rejoice.” We are changed by our relationship with each other and something new is created.

It is said that when the Beatles created music it was cooperation. Paul McCartney and John Lennon would write a song and bring it to Ringo Starr and George Harrison and tell them what to play and what to sing and they would cooperate by playing their part and a song would be achieved. Contrast this with the way the band U2 creates music. It begins with a few words or a bass line or a guitar riff that is introduced to the other three and then the process begins. There is give and take, and with four talented musicians, that sometimes lasts for weeks as these four try to find a singular chemistry that creates not only a song but an emotion that is deeply rooted.

Collaboration takes us one step beyond cooperation to a place that a goal is not simply reached but something new is created. The church is not a place for coexistence and it is not just cooperation, it is something more. Maybe the best description for the church is “collaboration which creates a future that none of us could have by ourselves.”

What does all of this have to say to us at Trinity Baptist Church? As we begin this year thinking of connecting to God and to each other, how are we to apply this teaching from Paul? First, we need to decide how, as individuals, we view the church.

Is my relationship to my church just coexistence? Is my participation simply sharing time and a space for worship? There are many reasons for just coexisting. It might be a lack of understanding that you, like everyone else, is important in the body of Christ? You have been gifted and you are a member of the body of Christ. You cannot simply say "I am not a part." You are a part, but you can continue to just coexist.

Is your relationship with the church cooperation? That is a good step forward. To cooperate is to recognize your own gifts and the gifts of others and that for your goals to be reached you need others. But cooperation still falls short. It is not just enough to cooperate.

What we need is collaboration. What we need to understand is how intricately we are woven together in unity by Christ. What we need to understand is that when we choose to find our place in the church and we accept others place in the church God does something wonderful. God creates something new. God creates the body of Christ which becomes the very instrument of God's work and the very presence of Christ in this world.

I know that all of you were saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our church's most valuable members -- Someone Else. Someone's passing created a vacancy that will be difficult to fill. Else has been with us for many years, and for every one of those years, Someone did far more

than the normal person's share of the work. Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results. Someone Else can work with that group. Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, or a meeting to attend, one name was on everyone's lips, "Let Someone Else do it". It was common knowledge that Someone Else was among the largest givers in the church. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone just assumed that Someone Else would make up the difference. Someone Else was a wonderful person, sometimes appearing super-human, but a person can only do so much. Were the truth known, everyone expected too much of Someone Else. Now Someone Else is gone. We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things Someone Else did? Remember, we can't depend on Someone Else anymore.

An usher had the job of going through each Sunday School class and collecting the offering in the classes and bringing it and putting it in the offering plates before worship. He came to one of the young children's classes who had a small model church that served as their bank. The man took the bank in his hands and began to take the money from the bank when one of the young children yelled out "Hey, Mister, be careful. You have our church in your hands."

It is really in your hands. It is really in every one of our hands. Our church will only be the body of Christ when we move from coexisting to cooperation to collaboration so that God might create the one that is the body of Christ from the many.

What are you going to do? The church is in your hands. ✿



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