

Title: When the Body Sings!
Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
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There are some parts of our body we think about every day. If our knees hurt, we think about our knees. If our back aches, we are reminded of it every time we stand up. But then there are other parts of our bodies we hardly ever notice... until one day we do.

Several years ago, I was walking through my house and cut a corner just a little too closely. My little toe found the corner of a piece of furniture before the rest of me did. Now, I do not know if you ever stubbed your little toe, but for about thirty seconds, my whole body forgot every other assignment it had. My eyes watered. My hands grabbed my foot. My balance disappeared. Later, after the pain died down a bit, I remember sitting there afterward thinking, "Really? All this because of one little toe?" (Pause)

Funny, is it not? Sometimes we do not notice the parts we depend on the most... until we suddenly need them.

Perhaps that's one of the reasons we're gathered the way we are this morning. Before we leave today, we'll notice one of the smallest members of Christ's Body as we baptize Otto. We'll notice our children as we bless their backpacks and send them into another school year. Maybe Paul is inviting us to practice noticing one another before we have to lose something to appreciate it.

Because the good news is this: **before we ever notice, God already has.**

That memory came back to me this week, and it made me wonder if churches have little toes. I think they do. I knew one. His name was Billie.

Billie was usually the first one at church every Sunday morning. Long before most of us arrived, Billie had already unlocked the doors. He had the coffee brewing, and the bulletins were arranged. The sanctuary was ready. At least that's what I noticed.

Week after week and year after year, Billie quietly made everything seem effortless. Then one afternoon, Billie passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. The following Sunday, everything changed.

People were asking where the bulletins were. Someone could not figure out the coffee machine. Just before worship, someone hurried over and whispered, "Pastor Eddie, I cannot light the candles."

"Why?"

"Billie always filled them with oil, and nobody knows where he kept it." So that Sunday, we worshiped with unlit candles. (Pause) Those unlit candles preached a sermon before I ever stood in the pulpit. Sometimes it takes an empty place to show us how full it once was. (pause) The truth is, we didn't really notice Billie until he wasn't there. I've wondered about that ever since.

Not just about Billie. About all the people whose quiet faithfulness keeps families together, communities together, and churches together.

Then this week I read Paul's words again, and one sentence refused to let me go: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose." For years, I've read this passage as though Paul were telling us what we ought to do. Appreciate one another. Don't compare yourself. Value every gift. And all of that is true.

This week, I noticed something I had never noticed before. The subject of the sentence isn't us. The subject is God. (Long Pause) That changes everything. Paul doesn't begin with our ability to notice one another. He begins with God's determination to notice us. **Before we ever noticed, God already had. (Pause) And the ones we overlooked were indispensable all along.**

God arranged the members. Before we ever discover our gifts, God has already given us a place. Before we ever serve, God has already made us part of Christ's Body.

In a few moments, we'll baptize Otto. He hasn't earned anything. He hasn't served on a committee. He hasn't made the coffee or sung in the choir. He hasn't done anything to deserve a place among us. Yet today we'll say what the gospel has always said: before Otto can ever choose God, God has already chosen him. Before he can ever serve Christ's Church, Christ has already claimed him. Baptism is the Church's way of saying, 'You belong before you achieve.'

That's why Paul doesn't say, "Try to become the Body of Christ." He simply announces, "You are the Body of Christ." The reason Paul can say that is because the crucified and risen Christ has made us his own. We are not simply gathered around Christ; by grace we are joined to his very life.

That's astonishing, given their mess and who the Corinthians were. They argued. They competed. They divided into little groups. They even turned Communion into an act of selfishness.

Yet Paul still says, "You are the Body of Christ." Not because of what they had accomplished. Because of what God had already done. That's grace. Maybe that's what I misunderstood about Billie. I thought his service made him important. It didn't. His quiet faithfulness simply revealed the place Christ had already given him.

There's a profound difference. One says, "If I work hard enough, maybe I'll belong." The Gospel says, "You already belong. Now you're free to serve." (Long Pause)

Notice Paul's words: "God arranged the members, each one of them." And Paul goes even further. He says the members of the Body who seem weaker are indispensable. That's a remarkable word. Paul does not simply say we ought to appreciate them. He says the Body cannot be the Body without them. Remove a toe, and suddenly we discover how much balance depended on it. Remove Billie, and suddenly the unlit candles begin preaching sermons. Remove the quiet prayers of the faithful saints, and a congregation loses something it did not even know was holding it together. **What we call insignificant, Paul calls indispensable. (Long Pause)**

And later this morning, we will gather our children around these backpacks. We will pray over backpacks that are too big for some shoulders and already worn out on others. We'll ask God to watch over classrooms and hallways, teachers and friendships. But perhaps we're also reminding these children of something even deeper. Wherever they go tomorrow morning, they do not go alone. They go as members of Christ's Body. They carry books and pencils, but they also carry the love, prayers, and faith of an entire congregation.

Not just the preacher. Not just the choir. Not just the elders. Each one. The child who is wiggling during worship. The widow is sitting quietly in her usual pew. The visitor who is wondering if they'll ever fit in. The one who makes coffee. The one who prays when nobody knows. Each one. God already knows their name. God already delights in them.

Sometimes we talk about church as though it were a machine. Machines are always asking, "What part do we need?"

But Paul says the Church isn't a machine. It's a body. Bodies ask different questions. Who's hurting? Who's missing? Who needs us? Because bodies share one life. And when people share one life, something extraordinary happens. When one person can no longer carry the song, the Body sings.

I learned that at my grandmother's funeral. We called her Ma-Ma. She loved Jesus. She loved this church. And she loved to sing "How Great Thou Art."

At her funeral, when the introduction began, I knew every word. But grief stole my voice. I wanted to sing. I simply couldn't. (Long Pause) Then the congregation sang. (Pause) They sang every verse. Strongly. Faithfully. Beautifully. (Pause) When I couldn't sing, they became my voice. (Long Pause)

Years later, I realized what had happened. They weren't simply singing a hymn. They were "being" the Body of Christ. They were doing for me what I could not do for myself.

I think that's exactly what Paul means when he says, "If one member suffers, all suffer together." He means much more than feeling sorry for one another. When one member is weak, the Body lends its strength. When one member cannot pray, the Body prays. When one member cannot hope, the Body hopes. When one member cannot sing, the Body sings. (Pause) That's what living bodies do.

I've begun wondering about us. Who has been a Billie for you? Who quietly carried you before you even realized you needed carrying? Who prayed for you? Who kept showing up until one day you realized how much their faithfulness had shaped your own?

Perhaps God has already arranged this Body so that your faith, your kindness, your prayer, and your hope might carry someone else's song for a little while. **Because before we ever noticed...God already had. (Long Pause) And the ones we overlooked were indispensable all along.**

God had already given Billie a place. God had already given Ma-Ma a song. Today, God has already claimed Otto as God's beloved child. Today, these children will leave carrying backpacks, but they will also carry the prayers of this congregation into every classroom and hallway.

And before you ever wondered whether you belonged, **God had already given you a place.** Because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another. So when one member rejoices, the Body rejoices. When one member grieves, the Body grieves. When one member cannot stand, the Body holds them. And when one member cannot sing, well, (Long Pause) **the Body sings. (silence)**