

Life Sunday Sermon 2021

1 Corinthians 12:22-26 “One of Life’s Most Profound Mysteries: From Invisible to Indispensable”

Rev. Fredric Hinz, Public Policy Advocate, Minnesota South and Minnesota North Districts
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The world is full of mysteries! Not just Agatha Christie, “who-done-it”-type mysteries, mysteries of human invention, but natural mysteries, mysteries that don’t just entertain but are really profound. Some of these concern the nature of the physical world itself, the world of which we ourselves are a part, bodily. Consider for a minute the mystery identified by scientists over the past century as they try to resolve the disconnect between two different views of the same physical world: One, described by Sir Isaac Newton, sees the material world as composed of small solid particles revolving around each other, while the other, made popular by more modern scientists, sees the same world as composed of ghost-like waves consisting of nothing but energy and information. How can that be?

Or consider the perplexing mystery posed by the relationship of the human brain and the human mind—the relationship of the material world of organic molecules and the immaterial world of thoughts and emotions. Just how does the physical brain generate non-physical ideas? And conversely, how do our thoughts impact our physical well-being?

Or, consider the deep mystery set out in Genesis 1:1, where we read, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Here, time and time again—six times, to be precise—we’re told, “God said ... and it was so!”

So, how does that work? Words are spoken; immaterial, invisible words are uttered; and a visible, material world is brought into being. Now if that isn’t a mystery, I don’t know what is! Indeed, it’s a mystery now fully acknowledged by mainstream science and scientists as they admit that the best scientific evidence points to the fact that the universe appears, not only to have had a beginning, but that it appears to have materialized in an instant and with a “Big

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Bang.” That is, not just something came into being, but everything—all matter—appeared all at once out of “nowhere” and from “nothing”! Of course, that’s not entirely true, for the “fact of the matter” is that before matter, there was not nothing but something, before matter there was Mind, which is to say, there was God. And so, it’s for good reason that the very first words of Scripture are: “In the beginning, God.” Because, in fact, it is God’s existence and God’s presence on which all of Scripture, all of human history, and all of natural history, depend. All very mysterious!

Today, our text sets out yet another mystery for us to consider. It is the mystery surrounding the profound unity we Christians share in the face of our exceedingly great diversity. “Unity in diversity,” that is the mystery described by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. There, he goes to great lengths to impress on the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth that they must highly value and jealously guard the unity, the Oneness, that is theirs in Christ. To that end, he urges them to guard against jealousies, discords, or divisions that might spring from within their community—especially those that would spring from the diversity of gifts that God Himself had given them. There, he calls to their attention the fact that some have been given the gift of great wisdom, while others possess great knowledge, and others the ability to heal, and still others have been given the ability to speak in tongues. And, yet, all of these gifts, Paul hastens to add, have the same origin, have been given by the same Lord in order to serve the same common good.

And it is to reinforce this theme of “unity in diversity” that Paul then goes on to employ an analogy, comparing a Christian congregation to a physical body. He says, to paraphrase: “Though a body is made of many parts, yet together they form one body, one unit.” A body is, of

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course, composed of many and varied parts, and indeed, its health, its continued existence depends on the proper functioning of each of those different parts. How foolish it would be, Paul says, should these various parts fail to appreciate the unity they share, fail to appreciate how highly integrated they are and must remain, fail to acknowledge either their own importance to the health of the whole or the importance of every other part. Yes, he says, it’s true that some parts are more visible than others, some are more “showy” than others, some have functions that seem to be more important than others. But, what is equally true, Paul says, is that God, the Great Designer, has declared all of them to be of equal worth, to be equally necessary for the functioning of the whole. And therefore, God will not tolerate the belittling of any of those parts. He says, “But God combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to 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” (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).

Of course, this principle of unity applies not just to our individual, physical bodies and not just to the body that we call “the Church;” it applies to this body we call “the community,” as well.

Here, too, God the Creator is insistent that there are no members of the human family, no members of society, that are to be considered “less than others,” that can simply be “dispensed with” as though they were not a part of the whole. Though, sadly, that is precisely what many in our “community,” our contemporary American community, now claim. For many, those youngest among us, those not yet born, those oldest among us, and those who for reasons of disability or frailty no longer circulate in public and are no longer “visible” to us are no longer considered to

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be part of the human community. For many, those who have not yet become sufficiently useful to the community or who have ceased to be useful as they once were are now frequently thought to be “dispensable,” especially if they are seen to impose some kind of a burden or cost on others. Indeed, in their view, these “dispensable ones” can—and should—be aborted or assisted in ending their own lives at will. Such is the harsh judgment of those influenced by the materialist philosophy of our age, of those whose evolutionary calculus equates worth with usefulness and value with strength. Such is the verdict of those for whom “out of sight, out of mind” has become the tragic guiding principle.

But thankfully, dear friends, that is not the “calculus” God uses to assess our value. Thankfully, that is not the principle God uses to judge our worth. In fact, far from relying on our visibility, our usefulness, or our strength to gauge our worth, God applies an entirely different standard. Indeed, Paul sums up this Divine standard when he says, “On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are, in fact, indispensable”—[and] are to be treated with “special honor, so there should be no division in the body” (1 Corinthians 12:22-23). There you have it. Obscurity, weakness, and dependency, far from being characteristics that would disqualify us from membership in the human community, are the very characteristics that make us more valuable in God’s sight. These are what give us greater worth.

To the world, this is a great and unfathomable mystery. That God would hold each and every person to be an equal and highly valued part of the whole based solely on their status as a human being, apart from any ability to do or to produce or to compete, is incomprehensible.

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Indeed, to the world, to be assigned worth based solely on having been created in the “the image and likeness of God” is not just unfathomable, it is a great offense!

But that is indeed what God has declared! He who spoke the world into existence, He who sustains that world with the power of His Word, He who has given us the ability to think and emote and contemplate the wonders of creation, He who held back nothing but freely gave His one and only Son to suffer in our stead, who sent the Divine Word to become flesh and blood like us, He is the One who declares each and every person, young or old, weak or strong, seen or unseen to be precious beyond measure. He is the One who has declared His love for us to be boundless and called on us to love every other human just as lavishly. He is the One who declares all human beings to be a necessary part of the whole, an indispensable part of the body. He is the One who declares every person to be loved with an everlasting love, a love expressed most clearly, most powerfully, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, who Himself began life as an unseen embryo, who Himself grew up in a small, out-of-the-way village unseen by the world, who “made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant, by being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7), He too has now become the indispensable One. He is now the One before whom “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth” (Philippians 2:10), Jesus Christ, He is the One who looks at each of us in love—even when we fail to regard our neighbor as a person of worth as we ought, even when we fail to treat them as the indispensable person they are—and declares us fully and freely forgiven by virtue of His sacrifice, His suffering and death on the cross, on our behalf.

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As amazing and awe-inspiring as the mysteries of the world are, this “unity in diversity” is the mystery that surpasses them all. That God, the creator of the universe, should love and care for us in our weakness and vulnerability; that God the One who spoke the world into existence should love and care for each of us in spite of our sinful and rebellious ways; that He declares each of us to be an indispensable part of the whole: This, dear friends, is a mystery beyond measure and beyond compare, and for which we cannot help but give God great thanks and praise. God grant that our lives might reflect that kind of thankfulness and embody that kind of praise. Amen.