ONE BODY BUT INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF IT

What difference can one person make?

That’s a significant question, particularly when we consider the serious problems and challenges the world faces. We see people devastated by poverty, hunger and homelessness and we think, “I’m just one person. Giving my gently used clothing to Good Will or the Salvation Army; or volunteering a few hours a month at the Preble Street Soup Kitchen; or giving some spare change or a dollar bill to a homeless person—what difference will that make?

We want to help protect the environment for future generations, but we think, “What difference will it really make if I recycle my used paper, cardboard, glass and plastic instead of throwing it away, don’t turn the thermostat any higher than 68° in the winter; and turn off the lights when I leave the room. I’m only one person.”

As members of this church we see various needs. Our congregation is always in want of financial support to sustain our mission and outreach efforts and pay our bills; many of our boards and committees have open positions that we can’t seem to fill; and Sunday School teachers and volunteers are in short supply and are worth their weight in platinum. And we see that need in our church and think, I’m just one person. So even if I give a little more money, sign up to teach Sunday School or become a Trustee or a Deacon, what
difference would that really make? And that keeps some people from doing anything.

Well, today the First Congregational Church of Scarborough is celebrating its members and letting it be known that one single person can indeed make a very big difference in the life of our congregation.

In this morning’s reading from 1 Corinthians, which is probably familiar to most, if not all of you, the apostle Paul compared the members of the Body of Christ, the church, to the individual members of the human body. There are many members of the body, each with their own unique responsibilities, and every one of those members and their responsibilities are important and they contribute to the well-being of the entire body. Moreover, the well-being of each individual member of the body is linked to all the other members. As Paul wrote, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” That’s why Paul also wrote, “. . . there should be no division in the body, but . . . its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

By the way, that means having concern for even the smallest, seemingly least significant member of Christ’s Body.

In an *Upper Room* devotional booklet a few years ago, a man named Ralph Daniel from the Republic of Singapore wrote about an injury he sustained and the unexpected limitations it put on him. Daniel wrote, “I’m a salesman, and I move briskly about on foot and by bus, going from client to client. About a year ago while at home playing and running with my dog, I accidentally hit my left small toe hard against the corner of a wooden door pillar. The doctor told me to rest the foot and not to wear the left shoe for two weeks. I had to cancel all appointments for 18 days; as a result I closed no sales and earned no income.”
“I was otherwise healthy and fit in every way, yet I became incapacitated by that injured little toe for 18 long days. A hurt little toe prevented me from earning any income! Only then did I appreciate THE IMPORTANCE of this toe which caused ‘all the members to suffer with it’!

“Confined at home, I had time to read the Bible and examine the Scripture. The Lord brought to my attention Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12. It became for me not just words but a forceful experience of the Scripture’s living truth. I experienced how the individual members of the Body of Christ, large and small, are mutually dependent on each another, and how pain in any part of Christ’s Body is pain for ALL OF US and calls for our tender care and understanding.

“The individual members of the Body of Christ, large and small, are mutually dependent on each another.”

In this church we have various members of the Body of Christ. Some of you are hearts, pumping vitality into our faith community; others are strapping arms that are able to carry heavy burdens and solve significant problems; still others are gentle fingers that reach out to lift the spirits of the sorrowing and help pick up those who have stumbled and fallen; and yet others are little toes that discreetly and almost imperceptibly help stabilize our congregation and keep it on its feet. ALL of the members of our faith community depend on each other, have a unique and significant role to play, and are important to the health and well-being of this Body of Christ as a whole.

I have another story—a parable, actually—that illustrates what individual members of the church are able to do—and are called by God to do. The parable goes like this.

In a distant country, a cathedral blazed with light without ceasing, day and night. The building gleamed in the light. Its beauty was overwhelming to
the eye, and enthralled all who visited or walked by the cathedral. But very few people worshiped there.

A terrible war destroyed a good portion of the country, including the beautiful cathedral. As the nation rebuilt, its wise ruler guided the rebuilding of the cathedral. Unknown to the people, she didn’t restore the lighting system.

At the ruler’s command, a worship service to dedicate the rebuilt cathedral was set for midnight on a warm spring night when there would be no moonlight. In the invitation, the ruler told every person who planned on attending to bring a small lighted lantern of a certain size and shape to the dedication.

On the night of the service, a strange and wonderful thing happened. At first only a few lights dotted the street outside the cathedral. When the worshipers entered the building, their lanterns cast small rays of light in the midnight darkness. And as more and more people entered the cathedral, the light grew bigger and brighter.

As each small lantern was set in the space provided for it in each pew seat, the cathedral gradually began to glow again. And when the building became filled with worshipers, the radiance of the hundreds of lanterns was so powerful that the sanctuary glowed brightly, the way it had before being destroyed during the terrible war.

At the beginning of the dedication service, the ruler said to the people, “Do you see how the light of your lanterns has restored the beauty and light of this cathedral? That is the way the light of your faith shines before others in the world. Without your light, this house of God will always be in darkness. This cathedral has no other source of light except WHAT YOU BRING INTO IT with your presence as members of this church. May that fact remind you, day
by day, how extremely important the light of your faith is—to the Body of Christ and to the world.”

That parable reveals an important truth: that as Christians and people of God, we ALL carry the light of our faith with us each and every day. That’s true in our church, too. Although time doesn’t allow us to hold up the lights of every one of the members of the First Congregational Church, we want you to know that we’re grateful and appreciative for each and every lamp of faith that has shone in past years and is shining in our midst today. Today on Member Appreciation Sunday, we celebrate all of our members—but we also want to mention some members of our congregation whose lights have shone particularly brightly, so we can publically thank them for their service to the First Congregational Church of Scarborough.

At this time, I want to invite Cliff Colville, the chairperson of the Membership Committee, to come up here now.

I will end my message this morning with two quotes spoken by Jesus. I think they’re appropriate words for us to reflect on during this worship service as we recognize and celebrate the members of our church. The first quote, from the fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, is:

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

And the second quote is one that I pray we will all hear from the lips of our Lord one day: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

May God bless the members of the First Congregational Church of Scarborough for the good things they do for God, their neighbors, and their faith community. Amen.