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We All Have a Part to Play 1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27

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Mother's Day can be a fun day of kids and husbands trying to do something special for the woman who makes every day special. Mother's Day can be difficult for those whose mother's have passed away and are dearly missed, for mother's who have lost children or husbands as the Bergstrom's just experienced with the death of their daughter Donna, for those who wish to be mothers but have not been able to for whatever reason. For those whose relationship with their mothers has been a positive one - it is a day to say thanks and express love. For those whose relationship has been less than what we hope for or expect; it is a day for forgiveness and release. One thing is for sure - we all need love from the important people in our lives and it helps to see love modeled for us especially by our mother.

Last Sunday I shared some quotes from a study that asked a group of 4-to-8-year-old children: "What does love mean?" Since there were some that seem to be appropriate for Mother's Day I thought I'd give you a few more.

- "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK." (Danny - age 7)
- "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." (Tommy - age 6)
- "My mommy loves me more than anybody. You don't see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night." (Clare - Age 5)
- "Love is when mommy gives daddy the best piece of chicken." (Elaine - age 5)
- "You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget." (Jessica - age 8)

In families, we learn as we grow up that **we all have a part to play**, there are roles, responsibilities, tasks, and chores for us all to do and these may change over time. The older we get the more capable we are of helping and contributing which is why you see children as they become teenagers begin to do things like the laundry, washing the dishes, picking up their rooms, even cleaning the bathroom without even being asked. They just see something like that which needs to be done and they do it spontaneously because now they have a part they can play and they are excited to make a contribution to the parents who have given them life and so much more. Isn't that what happens?

This is the time of year when our high school seniors have made their decision about where they will go to college in the fall and also the time when our college students are returning home for the summer. Some of them were playing Ultimate Frisbee with Pastor Kevin behind the church last evening. A mother related the following experience about a son going off to college. "For all their lives, my three sons have been told they have to do their chores around the house. *"I am NOT the maid"* is a phrase they've heard many times. When my oldest went off to college, he called me after one week at school. Among the first words he heard at college, he reported, were those of the dormitory housekeeper, announcing to a student who had not picked up after himself in the men's room, *"I am NOT your mother!"*

We all have a part to play in our families and in life and we need to figure out what that part or role is going to be. Have you ever been to a play that was a one man or one woman show? I read an article in last Sunday's Pittsburgh Tribune-Review about actor Hal Holbrook's one man show about American author Mark Twain. The article said, "It has been 53 years since Hal Holbrook gave his first solo performance as Mark Twain, the alias that writer Samuel Clemens used for 47 years. That means that Holbrook has been Mark Twain *six years longer* than Mark Twain was Mark Twain. But when this fact is pointed out to Holbrook, he objects. *"I'm not exactly Mark Twain,"* he says. *"I'm just an actor doing Mark Twain."* Arguably the longest-running show in theater history, *"Mark Twain Tonight!"* is a show that **Holbrook, now 82, has toured in for some part of every year since 1954 and performed more than 2,100 times.** Over time, Holbrook has **absorbed 16 hours of Twain**, and he still adds to it on a regular basis. His program lists some 73 selections from which he chooses as his mood and the day's news direct. Once onstage, he might spontaneously choose a selection or two based on audience response. *"The audience is the other actor,"* he says. *"I'm not performing for an imaginary character onstage. I'm re-creating what Mark Twain did -- talking to the audience."* Holbrook averages 30 to 35 shows a year. Holbrook has no intention of stopping or slowing down anytime soon. **"I'm going to keep on until I drop dead,"** he says.

One man shows are impressive and you leave the theatre saying, *"Wow, he was incredible! I can't believe how much he could do from memory and how he made the character come alive."* Your focus is very much on the single person.

In one sense, being a Christian and a part of the church is not like a one man show such as Hal Holbrook being Mark Twain. Being a Christian is more like being part

of a large ensemble cast needed to produce a show like 42nd Street with big song and dance numbers, and an elaborate set requiring lots of design, construction, music and lighting. Being a Christian is like being a part of a theatre group putting on a show. Being a Christian is like being a part of a team. It is like being a part of a physical body. We all have a part to play. That is what Paul writes to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27):

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, *“Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,”* that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, *“Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,”* that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, *“I have no need of you,”* nor again the head to the feet, *“I have no need of you.”* If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. **Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**”

Because of its strategic location for commerce, the city of Corinth was cosmopolitan, wealthy, a patron of the arts, religious (at least 26 temples and shrines), and well known for its sensuality. It was a bit of New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas all rolled into one place. The believers in the church are mostly Gentile although there are also some Jews. They love wisdom and knowledge, they are proud and arrogant, even to the point of judging other people including Paul, and they have a large number of internal problems. They have misunderstood the nature of leadership in the church and even of the Gospel itself. In chapters 12-14 Paul is trying to help the church understand that rather than being divided into several camps, that each member is a part of the body, they all have an important part to play, none more important than another, just as no spiritual gift is more important than another. They need each other to be whole and to live out the gospel in their city.

At BBC, we place a strong emphasis on serving according to our spiritual gifts, on finding the part that each of can play. I could talk about the countless ways people

are serving, people like, our Sunday School teachers and Children's worship leaders who each week prepare lessons and embody the love of Jesus for children, students, and adults alike. There are so many varieties of service, but the same Lord, as Paul says. Those who serve by making sure we have snacks and drinks after worship to encourage people to visit with one another and while other volunteers at the Welcome Center answer questions. Lois and Al Behrer and our team of people stock the Caring Cupboard and meet our neighbors in need of food to share food and a caring smile. We could talk about everyone who shares in visiting members and friends of the church, reading to people, bringing communion, or an encouraging word. We might mention the members of the Worship Team and the choir who serve through music to bless the Lord and all of us when we gather in God's name. Our Core Ministry Leaders are carrying a significant leadership load and are crucial to all that happens at BBC. These are just a few of the ways all of you are engaged in ministries of service.

In recent weeks, Bill Carter, Ken Fowler, George Haller, Dave and Bev Tenhor, Steve and Diane Jones, Al and Joanne Bassett, Ron Rich, John Kornblee, Ron Simons, and Warren Price have worked so hard next door on the parsonage as well as on the church building and grounds. They have been giving hours and hours, and days and days, scraping, painting, doing electrical work, digging, planting, mulching, to make the house next door and the church look beautiful. One of the aspects of spiritual gifts that Paul addresses is that no spiritual gift is more important than another, so none of us should become puffed up. The preacher is not more important than the nursery volunteer, in fact I may be less important. All spiritual gifts and the part they play are to be exercised with the attitude of servanthood and love.

Today we will be receiving our special offering for our Habitat for Humanity project to sponsor a home here in Brewster and in Haiti to assist two families to buy a safe, affordable home of their own. Additionally we hope to raise funds to pay for work on the parsonage next door. We all have a part to play in both funding and doing the work. A few people have asked if they may designate their giving and if that is important to you it is absolutely fine with me if you do so. We have helped people around the world in times of crisis, I have been a part of serving teams that have repaired and worked on building homes in North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Puerto Rico. Now we get to serve our own community in this way.

Henri Nouwen wrote, “No Christian is a Christian without being a minister. Whatever form the Christian ministry takes, the basis is always the same: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”¹

I have been a part of teams for most of my life. In a family, in school, in sports, at church and on every team we all have a part to play. In the book *Divine Appointments*, Bob Jacks shares what he and his wife Betty have learned after 35 years of evangelistic ministry about being a team player. They believe an ideal team member has the following characteristics. Total commitment to Jesus Christ, enthusiasm for Christ’s Great Commission, optimism in God’s faithfulness, reliance on the Holy Spirit, flexibility and resilience, motivation to get equipped for maximum availability to God, confidence in being able to contribute to the team, dedication to reaching out and seeing the team’s mission through, a sense of humor and an upbeat, positive attitude, good listening skills, patience as God works in the team and the people with whom it has contact, and faith that the team is winsome.²

We all have a part to play on every team we are a part of – in our families, at school or work, at church, and in our world. That role will be shaped by the gifts and talents the Lord has given us, our level of commitment, and the season of our life. In his play *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wrote,

**“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. “**

Shakespeare goes on to describe the seven stages of life from infancy to our senior years. The speech ends rather depressingly with senility and oblivion. As Christians we don’t think it has to end that way. When I began I said there was a sense in which being a Christian and part of the church was not like doing a one man show where the focus is all on one person. But in another sense, being a follower of Jesus is much like what actor Hal Holbrook has done to embody Mark Twain so well. He has worked every week for over 50 years reading, studying, and absorbing Mark Twain’s writing, his thought, his beliefs, so that he can respond and interact with an audience with the very words and spirit Mark Twain would use.

¹ Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, Image Books, New York, 1971, 114.

² Bob Jacks and Matthew R. Jacks, *Divine Appointments*, Nav Press, Colorado Springs, 2002, 87-88.

As Christians, we are to let Jesus live in us, and become so familiar with his teaching and guidance, that His Spirit is reflected in our words and our speech, so that we can interact with others as Jesus would. Of the part he plays, 82 year old Hal Holbrook said, "**I'm going to keep on until I drop dead,**" and that is the way we are to feel about playing our part as disciples of Jesus. We keep going until the Lord calls us home.

Blessing: "**Let all that you do be done in love.**" 1 Corinthians 16:14

In his play *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wrote,

"All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,

Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.

And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel

And shining morning face, creeping like snail

Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,

Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad

Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,

Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,

Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,

Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,

In fair round belly with good capon lined,

With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,

Full of wise saws and modern instances;

And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts

Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,

With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,

His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide

For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,

Turning again toward childish treble, pipes

And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,

That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”