

The text this morning comes from 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a.

As many of you know, this scripture is an excerpt from the letter that Saint Paul wrote to a growing group of believers in the city of Corinth. But before we get into the text, I would like to give a brief background for the context of this letter.

Saint Paul was a very strong believer in the Christian faith. This was not a bad thing by any stretch of the word. As a leader in the Christian faith, he found it necessary to expand this new religion, this Christianity, so that its wonderful news could be heard on every continent of the world. He did not go about the choosing of such places to focus his gospel-preaching efforts haphazardly, either. One very wise decision Paul made was choosing Athens as the Christian outreach base of operation. The pagan culture of Athens heavily influenced the culture of Europe at that time, making it an ideal place to impress beliefs upon. The only problem is that it didn't work, so he moved out of Athens to what would turn into a success story of great magnitude. Paul moved to the city of Corinth.

The success of Paul's visit to Corinth in contrast to Athens could be blamed on Corinth's fairly recent establishment. Only about a hundred years before Paul visited, Corinth was first put on the map as a Roman colony. This newness left the doors wide open for cultural and religious molding, as opposed to Athens where their culture was reinforced by centuries of belief and practice. Paul preached his beliefs to whoever would listen to his good news. His new approach to this task was taking a very humble role, not trying to impress people as he had before, but this time, showing them the way to true happiness.

As it turns out, during Paul's time, the city of Corinth was a thriving center of commerce. Corinth was where businesses from Western and Eastern countries met for trade, it was where cultures were smashed together, it was where people from all over the world sat down and talked business. Being a very metropolitan city, Corinth was densely populated, overflowing with people from all walks of life, people with very different cultures, and people who were parts of varying classes. This created a very diverse congregation. Slaves, Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, Pagans, and every other kind of person quickly joined the church. But this abnormally diverse group of people led to the inevitable -- conflict. Some thought the service was too chaotic, others too structured. Some thought it was too noisy, and again others thought that it was too quiet. While others were slow to accept those different from themselves, Paul knew that the diversity of the church was definitely one of its fortes. In response, Paul wrote the following in his letter to the people of Corinth:

.....

When reading that scripture, and talking about it, I have always had a problem with using the image of a body as an adequate way of explaining the message Paul was trying to get across to the people of Corinth. When read right before a discussion on it in any Sunday School class, no matter where you are, who you are with, or how die-hard religious that group may be, there is always that one person or group that brings up a body organ that is of little or no use other than to increase one's weight.

“What about the appendix?”, or “What about the tonsils?”, at which point the other people in the room get annoyed at those who made the comment for not simply taking it as it is. And now, thanks to modern medicine, anyone can now lead a normal life even if they are missing an arm, a leg, or all of the above. Thanks, medicine, for making Jill's job that much more difficult than it already is. Awesome.

So I rewrote this letter Paul sent to the people of Corinth with a modern-day, impenetrable twist. Instead of using a human body, I used a 1972 Volkswagen Beetle Baja, my dream car. This car is as basic as they come. An engine, a transmission, a frame, and a seat or two. No air conditioning, no reclining

seats, no bells and whistles to ooh and ah the driver and its passengers. Just a simple, point A to point B reliable car. Ill read to you the beginning of this rewritten scripture, and let you fill in the rest.

“The automobile is a unit, though made up of many parts; and though its parts are many, they form one working vehicle. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one spirit into the body -- whether Jews or Muslims, slave or free -- and we were all given one spirit to drink. Now the car is not made up of one part but of many. If the wheel should say “because I am not one of the four pistons , I am not a part of this finely tuned automotive machine,” it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the vehicle.”

You can figure out what the rest sounds like.

Now imagine that this church is a car. Look around you, and imagine what this church would be like without someone. Even simple tasks that are sometimes easily seen as unimportant can oftentimes become a major factor in this church’s growth. These small tasks can be so little as to include the replacing of a light bulb in the library.

I can remember back before Ben Olive was a member here. One morning I invited him to vacation bible school, but was interrupted with the lame “I’m too tired” excuse.

“Dude.” I said, stalling for time, trying to come up with a persuasive argument that could bring his seemingly solid argument down without a fight. Then it hit me. “Dude. There’s coffee,” I proudly announced to the pile of a person lying so relaxed on his bed under his nice warm comforter. What a sinner. Ben, as it turns out, is an abnormally proficient caffeine consumer who could singlehandedly maintain the successful coffee industry in America today. Unbeknownst to me at that time, Ben Olive’s house contained only instant coffee which I would later find out Ben did not approve of. Today, Ben attends Georgia Tech, but his mother, Mrs. Carolyn Olive, his younger sister Emily Olive, and his younger brother, Nick Olive can be seen here almost every Sunday. All because someone made a pot of coffee on a Sunday morning eight years ago that was the cornerstone of my argument which persuaded Ben to come on over to Emory Presbyterian Church. A pot of coffee.

Now think of how many different people have contributed such minute things to this church over time, and it all adds up quickly. Where would we be without John Neagle, who comes running at the first sign of feedback from the mics, eager to fix the problem. How could we survive without Carrie, who has singlehandedly supported the Parents Night Out program ever since Carolyn Christie left? I can guarantee anyone that if they were to go up to Elise and ask her about the choir, she would say that the choir could not exist without any one person thats in it. Give it up for Nancy Wright on the piano. Thank Scott for being such a warm greeter. Think of how much effort Tim, Dan, Bill, and my dad, Bennett put into making this church a more comfortable place to worship. Wednesday night supper is a weekly, united effort that brings people together around good ol’ southern food and warm company.

We make up one, fully functional vehicle that propels us down the path of righteousness. If one part of the vehicle malfunctions for any reason, we pull over. We stop, and help until that part is running again, and then we keep going.