

June 30, 2019  
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1 Corinthians 12: 12–26 Won't You Be My Neighbor?  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

1 Corinthians 12: 12–26 Common English Bible

Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like God wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? But as it is, there are many parts but one body. So the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you," or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.

In 1969 black Americans were still prevented from swimming alongside whites, and an episode of "Mister Rogers Neighborhood" broke the color barrier. Despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964, black citizens were still not embraced as equal participants in public life. At community pools across the country, whites used intimidation and violence to prevent blacks from sharing the water with them. During the show, white Mister Rogers asked black Police Officer Clemmons if he'd like to join him in soaking his bare feet in a children's wading pool on a hot summer day.

Clemmons said he didn't have a towel, and Mister Rogers said that Officer Clemmons could share his. Two men took off their shoes and socks, rolled up their pants and then swished their feet together in a shallow pool on a hot day. Their simple actions showed that a black man and a white one could peacefully share the water. When Officer Clemmons got out of the water, he used Mister Rogers' towel to dry his feet and then Mister Rogers used the same towel. That casual intimacy exposed the bigotry of white people who were denying black people access to a swimming pool or any other place in society.

Twenty-four years later, on Officer Clemmons last day on the Mister Rogers show, they recreated the pool scene. This time Mister Rogers took the towel and dried Officer Clemmons' feet himself. Francois Clemmons said that he saw a connection to Jesus washing his disciples' feet, "I am a black gay man and Fred washed my feet." Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him (John 13:3-5)

Mister Rogers approached conflict head-on. He waded right into the water and tackled subjects no other children's TV show would dare. Jesus did the same thing, and Paul does too in the scripture we read. Paul uses this metaphor about parts of the body and their relationship to one another. He bases that metaphor in Christ because we are all given one Holy Spirit for the common good. Each one of us is to contribute in our own special and distinctive work to the well-being of the whole body. It is in baptism that by the working of the Holy Spirit, we are made into one body. No matter how different we are from each other, there is one body and there is one Spirit working in all of us. Our differences enrich the vitality of the body. We have different stories, different experiences, and different opinions, but our unity lies in being one in Christ. We belong to one another. We need each other.

So, how can we listen more? How can we lift up one another better? How can we learn to love one another through our differences? Jim Wallace, the founder of Sojourners, shares a story in his book *America's Original Sin* about having dinner with the mom of one of his coworkers, Butch. Jim Wallace is white and his coworker Butch is black. Butch's mom shared about life in Detroit and different experiences she had, including experiences with the police. Then Butch's mom said, "So I tell all of my children, if you are ever lost and can't find your way back home, and you see a policeman, quickly duck behind a building or down a stairwell. When the policeman is gone, come out and find your own way back home." Jim Wallace remembered the words his mom had told him, "If you are ever lost and can't find your way home, look for a policeman. The policeman is your friend. He will take care of you and bring you safely home."<sup>1</sup>

In Mister Rogers Neighborhood, Francois Clemmons had grown up being afraid of the police, and then he played one on TV. Maybe it starts with listening. Listening as someone shares what they learned growing up. Was a policeman a friend or someone to fear? Listening as someone describes hearing "the talk" from their parent. Not a talk about the birds and the bees, but a talk about how to behave and not behave with police.

This place is called to proclaim and work for the sacred worth of every single human being as we resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We are called to be a church that asks why the prison population in Texas is disproportionately Black and Hispanic persons. We are called to ask why there are so few Black and Hispanic persons in high-paying jobs. We are called to ask why white persons receive preferential treatment from white police officers. The body of Christ is broken and we are called to work together to restore it.

I want to invite Vonda Klimaszewski to share about something that she has been a part of that has transformed her life.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Wallace, *America's Original Sin* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 2.