

I Corinthians 12:12-31a
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The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

12For 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. 13For 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. 14Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15If 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. 16And 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. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21The 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.” 22On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

By Friday night, the Mega Millions Jackpot in the nation-wide lottery had reached a 396 million dollars. Now let's be honest, how many of you when you hear the numbers get that high, then you're tempted to go out and buy a lottery ticket? Isn't it crazy that when it's a paltry 40 or 50 million, we don't think about it and when it gets to be some huge number, so many of us will buy one, when the odds against us winning are so much greater? That was one of the funny things when a web site was trying to come up with illustrations about how great the odds against winning were. One in 200 million or something like that were the odds of winning the lottery. Odds that you will die being struck by lightning, one in 134,906. Odds of being attacked by a shark, (something that I looked up before we went to Hawaii) one in 11.5 million. Odds that you will be elected president of the United States, one

in 10 million. One in 200 million, but we went out and bought tickets because we dreamed that it might be us. But should we want it to be us? What happens if we do win the lottery? The other things this web site was listing were stories of people whose lives were ruined by winning the lottery. They squandered their winnings, they stopped trusting their friends, they fought with their families—many of them wished that they had never bought those tickets. But isn't this what they wanted? If they had made a wish the week before winning the lottery, how many of them would have wished for this exact thing—money enough to do whatever they wanted? How many of us would wish for the same thing? That's the old saying, "Be careful what you wish for, because you may get it?" What are your dreams? Do you really want them to come true?

One of the books I've been reading is "Life is in the Transitions: Mastering Change at Any Age," by Bruce Feiler, and I recommend it to anyone who is struggling these days with the changes in our lives that we did not anticipate. But in it he talks about how we view our life stories and he chronicles the stories of many people who have been through tragedies and difficulties. One of them is a man named Chris Waddell, a man who in training for the Olympic ski team, broke his back and became a paraplegic at the age of twenty and he thought his life was over. Then he went on to a glorious career as a Paralympian. When that ended at thirty-four, he again thought his life was over. Retiring from competitive skiing was "far more difficult" than breaking his back, he told Feiler. "I had no idea who I was, and I felt betrayed by my passion. It just dropped me off a cliff."

So he decided to climb another cliff. Specifically, he hatched a dream to become the first disabled person to summit Kenya's Mount Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain in Africa. Since he couldn't use his legs, though, Chris would need to scale all 19,341 feet by pedaling a four-wheel mountain bicycle using only his arms. He raised money, trained for the altitude, built a special vehicle, and recruited an international team to assist him by securing him to a winch, laying down boards on the mountain and helping him navigate the boulders, altitude, bodily demands, and stress. At 41 years old, he set off. The seven day climb was brutal. At times he moved only a foot a minute. International media were rapt

by his heroism. But then, a mere hundred feet from the summit, the boulders became too large, the wheels of his vehicle too meager, the path unpassable. He had to abandon his dream.

“I was crushed,” he said. “I could see the top. My sole job was to get there. It was not about *one man gets broken and overcomes anything*. To me, that's a ridiculous cliché. It was about promising that I would do this. It was about so many people having sacrificed to give me that opportunity, and now I've just failed everybody.” His partners persuaded Chris to let them carry him the final inches to the summit, where he posed for pictures and listened to the local guides sing celebratory songs in Swahili, all while he felt fraudulent and guilty.

“And it wasn't till much later, when I started telling the story to schoolkids, that I realized the lesson was there all along. *Nobody climbs a mountain alone*. That was the thing I had to discover: the value of the team. Because for me to say I climbed it myself was complete fantasy. There were so many people who worked so hard. Making it to the top on my own would have perpetuated a lot of what I was trying to eliminate: the sense of separation. That people with disabilities need to be apart. We don't. We need other people. That's why I talk about that day as a gift. It taught me what I most needed to learn: that I'm just like everybody else.”¹

What dream do you have? Is it climbing a mountain or winning the lottery? What is it that we want? What do we want in our deepest desires? Where do we want to be healed? What relationship do we want restored? What measure of wealth would we really like? Now if someone said that we could have it, would we jump at the chance? Perhaps we don't want it given to us because we are proud of being able to do everything ourselves. We are self made people and we don't need anyone to give anything to us. Or maybe we could only be healed if it meant giving up our illness. What if someone said that we could be healed of all bitterness, anger, envy and we could live in peace the rest of our lives. But to do that we have to give up our pride and selfishness and desires to be always right.

Would we take it? What if we could have a life or a church that is joyful, exciting and effective? But

¹ Feiler, Bruce. *Life is in the Transitions: Mastering Change at Any Age*. pp. 294-5.

to have that we have to open our eyes, give up any blindness that keeps us from seeing things as they really are? Do we accept it? Are we ready to see that not only are we gifted by God, but all of us are part of the same body, as Paul says in First Corinthians, we are all part of each other and we need each other? Are we ready for that? Are the dreams and wishes, whether they are about winning the lottery or climbing a mountain on our own, more important than the relationships?

We are part of each other. Maybe we dream about great accomplishments or winning the lottery because that would feed that fantasy that we don't need each other, that we can navigate this life on our own. Paul tells us again that we are part of the Body of Christ and we belong to Christ and to one another. I think the body is one of the most powerful images for the church that we have in Scripture. That metaphor communicates to us both complexity and an organic unity. Think about it, what is your place in the church? Are you an apostle, or a prophet, or a teacher or one who does deeds of power, or the others that Paul listed? Maybe you had trouble envisioning yourself as any of those. But think about the church as a body? What part of the body are you? Maybe you're a hand, doing simple tasks, offering help, giving a pat on the back. Maybe you're a foot, moving the church along, helping to find the way. Maybe you're a brain, planning, researching, helping us think clearly. Maybe you're the eyes, helping us to see what's coming and to see where we're going and where we've been. Maybe you're the funny bone, helping to laugh, especially at ourselves when we've made a misstep and bumped into something. We need all those parts of the body. We need each other. We need you.