

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

A Sermon for Reconciling in Christ Sunday

BY PASTOR JAN PETERSON

"Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many."

1 Corinthians 12:14

I love doing puzzles. For Christmas one year my husband gave me a 2,000-piece puzzle – one of those difficult ones with very similar colors throughout. What does that have to do with this message or the scriptures for this Sunday? Because every time I read the text from 1 Corinthians that includes the verse above, I think about puzzles. As I put the puzzle together piece by piece a picture begins to emerge – an image that is only complete when the last puzzle piece joins the others. For me this is what St. Paul is speaking of when he talks about the Body of Christ.

Just as a puzzle isn't complete without all the pieces, Paul says the Body of Christ is not complete without all of its members. "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', for we are all one Body." As we think about inclusivity in the church - we are reminded in this text that God's image – God's puzzle of God's world includes all of God's people. We all make up the Body of Christ and are "individually members of it."



We remember that we are in this together. We are part of the beautiful Body of Christ. We are many and varied. Tall, short, young, old, black, white, brown, tan, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, straight and... We are the hands, feet, eyes, ears, fingers, toes, nose, and other parts of the Body of Christ. We are interwoven and without each other God's picture is incomplete. Anyone who does puzzles knows how frustrating it is to get to the end of a puzzle and be missing pieces. We should be just as frustrated when we are members of the Body of Christ.

One of the most memorable books I read during my seminary education was Desmond Tutu's book "God Has a Dream." In this book Bishop Tutu says the following about God's dream: "Dear Child of God, before we can become God's partners, we must know what God wants for us. 'I have a dream,' God says. 'Please help me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and

caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that my children will know they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, my family."

As Desmond Tutu says so eloquently, we are members of one family – God's family. We are one. St. Paul says: when "one member suffers, all suffer together with it." This makes sense if we think about our own bodies. Often when one part of the body is in pain, or not working properly, other parts of our bodies are affected. A painful elbow can send pain all the way up your arm and into the back of your head. All of your body tightens in reaction to the pain. Likewise, when one member of God's family suffers... we all suffer whether we realize it or not.

Leelah Alcorn was suffering. In her own words Leelah said: To put it simply, I feel like a girl trapped in a boy's body, and I've felt that way ever since I was 4. Leelah struggled each day. She was a member of the Body of Christ but... rather than suffering with Leelah, the Body of Christ that she grew up in judged and excluded her. In the note she left behind prior to walking into the path of a truck on an interstate highway, Leelah says: "Please don't be sad, it's for the better. The life I would've lived isn't worth living in ... because I'm transgender," I never knew there was a word for that feeling, nor was it possible for a boy to become a girl, so I never told anyone and I just continued to do traditionally 'boyish' things to try to fit in." At the age of 14 when Leelah finally understood who she was she immediately told her mom. Leelah's note says: my mom reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God made me a boy, that I am wrong."

We are the Body of Christ. We are called to suffer with fellow members of the Body of Christ who are suffering – people who, like Leelah, are being told they can't be part of this beautiful Body of Christ...and be their authentic selves at the same time. This suffering isn't a passive kind of suffering. It is suffering that leads to action. It's suffering that speaks up against exclusion. It is suffering that reminds the other parts of the Body that God's image – God's puzzle – God's dream includes all of God's people... period.