

***"Today You, Tomorrow Me"***  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**August 20, 2017**

**First Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:26-28**

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

**Second Scripture Reading: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:12-26**

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup>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." <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and 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; <sup>24</sup>whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.



**Sermon: *"Today You, Tomorrow Me"***

I'll be honest with you, by the time this week was over, I had about a dozen tabs open on my computer where I started writing a sermon and gave-up on it. The open tab is the digital-age equivalent of writing a page or two and then balling it up and throwing it at the trash can. I just wasn't sure where to begin. There are so many things that need to be said; but, I want to make sure that what I say to you from this pulpit is what I believe God is leading me to say and not just my own opinions.

If it were as easy as just saying the first thing that came to mind I could talk for days. I am disgusted with the white supremacy movement in this country and with the fear, and hatred, and ignorance that its members exemplify. I am angered by the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia last week and I am perplexed that anyone could try to argue that the counter-protestors who

stood up to racists' anti-Semitic ideologies could be considered the equivalent of the Neo-nazis, and Klansmen and white nationalists who espoused them.

I want to quote Dr. Martin Luther King who wrote from a Birmingham jail cell that "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people."<sup>1</sup>

I want to quote Tina Fey who said about that supposed moral ambiguity in Charlottesville, "I've seen Raiders of the Lost Ark, and I wasn't confused by it... Nazis are always bad."<sup>2</sup>

But you didn't come here this morning to hear my take on the news or to be another talking head covering ground that's been well-travelled these past few days. You came, to hear a word from God.

So, instead I'll talk with you about the very beginning, when God first created human beings and about the way the apostle Paul saw those human beings as small parts of something much bigger. And then I'll tell you a story.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God creates people in God's own image. It's a little quirk of translation that when God says, "Let us make humankind in our image," it is ambiguous as to whether this means that each individual human will be made in the image of God or that the entire group, together, will be.

If it's the former, then each person by him or herself will bear God's complete image, like a statue. But I believe it's the latter: together we are made in God's image and each person bears a small part of that larger image, and you can only see God fully, when you include everyone, kind of like tiles in a mosaic.

Or Legos.

My kid loves Legos and truth be told, so do I. You can make almost anything with them if you are creative enough and patient enough. The pieces are different sizes and shapes and colors. Some of them do things like bend or turn. And just because you aren't using a piece right now, doesn't mean it won't come in handy later.

Once, we were building a model of a ship from *Star Wars* (technically, it was *The Empire Strikes Back*... but I digress) and Will Grey couldn't find a couple of the pieces that came in the box so he just replaced them with spares that he had on hand in his own big box of random Legos. I pointed

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<sup>1</sup> King, Martin Luther. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Received by Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter, et al, *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*, Stanford University, 16 Apr. 1963, [kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail](http://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail).

<sup>2</sup> "Saturday Night Live Weekend Update Summer Edition." Performance by Tina Fey, et al., season 1, episode 2, NBC, 17 Aug. 2017, [www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/weekend-update-tina-fey-on-protesting-after-charlottesville/3570730?snl=1](http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/weekend-update-tina-fey-on-protesting-after-charlottesville/3570730?snl=1).

out that in the movies, real snow speeders didn't have green and blue pieces mixed in. And he said Dad, "It's the right piece. The color doesn't matter."

When God makes human beings, God makes each of us such that we bear a small part of God's image. When you start throwing away pieces, you lose something important. If you only include the white pieces or the brown pieces or the big pieces or the small pieces, you don't get an accurate idea of what God is like. To get the entire picture, you must put them all together.

How does our view of the world around us - and the people in it - change when we understand each other as vital pieces to a larger picture? All of a sudden, no one is disposable. No single individual, no matter how poor, no matter how far away, no matter how strange and different is unimportant, because each one bears a small piece of the image of God. Then, to hate, to ostracize, to push people out is to diminish the very image of God.

That's consistent with the body imagery Paul uses in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12. The human body is a wondrous thing because it is composed of such amazing, and intricate parts: hands that grasp, muscles that push and pull, eyes that see and a brain capable of complex thought. You can certainly adapt to life without some of those parts, but the human body is designed so that all of them work in concert together.

It would be too easy to decide "well, I don't really need my pinky toes" and get rid of them. But then you'd have a tough time balancing on your feet when you stand up.

Or you could just decide you'd be better off without nose hair and cut them all out, but then you'd be getting rid of part of the filtration system that helps prevent you from breathing dust and dirt directly into your lungs.

Paul understood that like a body, the church is a product of all its parts. Every person is important. Every person has a role. And when you start dismissing parts as unimportant or removing them all together, the church doesn't function. And that's the way the world works, too.

We need each other. All of us.

You see, the problem with racism and white supremacy and anti-Semitism and all of those hateful ideologies, is that they claim that one group of people is more important than all the others; that one color of skin or one religious belief or one gender identity makes a person better. As the leaders of our denomination wrote this week in a letter you can find reproduced in your bulletins, those ideologies are lies.

*"They are lies about the human family, [because] they seek to say that some people are less than other people. [And] They are lies about God because*

*they falsely claim that God favors some people over the entirety of creation.”<sup>3</sup>*

But I don't have to tell you that. I'm just preaching to the choir, right? None of us subscribes to those kind of beliefs. None of us supports those kinds of hate groups.

But here's the thing, for that kind of ideology to prosper, it doesn't need our help. It just needs our complacency. It needs us to grow weary of the pain and the turmoil and to turn off the TV, or set down the newspaper, or scroll down the page to where the funny cat videos are linked.

It needs us to enjoy the privilege of not being directly affected and to get comfortable with watching our brothers and sisters stand in resistance from afar. But in case you missed it, that's not how Jesus functioned.

Jesus got out there and shook things up. He spoke truth to power. He welcomed the outsiders and the sinners and the people that had been pushed to the margins. Never forget ... that Jesus died ... because of the way he lived. He was crucified because of what the Jewish authorities considered blasphemy and what the Roman authorities considered treason.

The great existential question has always been why are we here? What is our purpose in life? Well I believe God put us here to look out for each other; to care for and support each other. To represent God to each other.

Hate and ignorance flourish in the darkness. That means you and I **must** reflect the light of God's grace, and mercy and steadfast love into the world. And it starts by honoring the full image of God that shines in all God's people; by loving and by being merciful and by welcoming, and by honoring all the diverse, complex, and amazing pieces that make up that full image.

And it means having courage to stand-up for the oppressed and against injustice, to speak when voices are silenced, to reach out when there is need. Every. Single. Time.

And now, the story I promised you. It comes to us from a Reddit user named "Rhoner" and I'll read it the way he wrote it... slightly edited... because, you see, Rhoner uses some colorful language from time to time.

*This past year I have had three instances of car trouble. A blow-out on a freeway, a bunch of blown fuses and an out-of-gas situation. All of them were while driving other peoples' cars which, for some reason, makes it worse on an emotional level. It makes it worse on a practical level as well, what with the fact that I carry things like a jack and extra fuses in my car, and know enough not to park, facing downhill, on a steep incline with less than a gallon of fuel.*

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson, J. Herbert, et al. "PC(USA) Leaders Condemn White Supremacy, Racism." *PCUSA.Org*, Presbyterian Church (USA), 14 Aug. 2017, [www.pcusa.org/news/2017/8/14/pcusa-leaders-condemn-white-supremacy-racism/](http://www.pcusa.org/news/2017/8/14/pcusa-leaders-condemn-white-supremacy-racism/).

Anyway, each of these times... I was DISGUSTED with how people would not bother to help me. I spent hours on the side of the freeway waiting [for AAA to show], watching roadside assistance vehicles blow past me... The four gas stations [where] I asked for a gas can... told me that they couldn't loan them out "for my safety" but I could buy... one with no cap for \$15. It was enough, each time, to make you say... "this country is going to hell in a handbasket."

But you know who came to my rescue all three times? Immigrants. Mexican immigrants. None of them spoke a lick of the language. But one of those dudes had a profound [effect] on me.

He was the guy that stopped to help me with a blow-out with his whole family of six in tow. I was on the side of the road for close to four hours. Big jeep, blown rear tire, had a spare but no jack. I had signs in the windows of the car, big signs that said NEED A JACK and offered money. No dice.

Right as I am about to give up and just hitch out [of] there, a van pulls over and dude bounds out. He sizes the situation up and calls for his youngest daughter who speaks English. He conveys through her that he has a jack but it is too small for the Jeep so we will need to brace it. He produces a saw from the van and cuts a log out of a downed tree on the side of the road. We rolled it over, put his jack on top, and bam, in business. I start taking the wheel off and, if you can believe it, I broke his tire iron. It was one of those collapsible ones and I wasn't careful and I snapped the head... clean off...

No worries, he runs to the van, gives it to his wife and she is gone in a flash, down the road to buy a tire iron. She is back in 15 minutes, we finish the job with a little sweat and cussing (stupid log was starting to give), and I am a very happy man. We are both filthy and sweaty. The wife produces a large water jug for us to wash our hands in. I tried to put a 20 in the man's hand but he wouldn't take it so I instead gave it to his wife as quietly as I could. I thanked them up one side and down the other. I asked the little girl where they lived, thinking maybe I could send them a gift for being so awesome. She says they live in Mexico. They are here so mommy and daddy can pick peaches for the next few weeks. After that they are going to pick cherries then go back home. She asks if I have had lunch and when I told her no, she gave me a tamale from their cooler, the best... tamale I have ever had.

So, to clarify, a family that is undoubtedly poorer than you, me, and just about everyone else on that stretch of road, working on a seasonal basis where time is money, took an hour or two out of their day to help some strange dude on the side of the road when people in tow trucks were just passing me by. Wow...

But we aren't done yet. I thank them again and walk back to my car and open the foil on the tamale 'cause I am starving at this point and what do I find inside? My... \$20 bill! I whirl around and run up to the van and the guy rolls his window down. He sees the \$20 in my

*hand and [starts] just shaking his head “no,” like he won't take it. All I can think to say is “Por Favor, Por Favor, Por Favor” with my hands out. Dude just smiles, shakes his head and, with what looked like great concentration, tried his hardest to speak to me in English:*

*“Today you.... tomorrow me.”*

*Rolled up his window, drove away, his daughter waving to me in the rear [window]. I sat in my car eating the best... tamale of all time and I just cried. Like a little girl. It has been a rough year and nothing has broken my way. This was so out of left field I just couldn't deal.*

*In the five months since, I have changed a couple of tires, given a few rides to gas stations and, once, went 50 miles out of my way to get a girl to an airport. I won't accept money. Every time I tell them the same thing when we are through:*

*“Today you.... tomorrow me.”<sup>4</sup>*

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come.  
Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Rhoner. Comment on “Have You Ever Picked Up A Hitchhiker?” Reddit.com, circa 2011, [https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/elal2/have\\_you\\_ever\\_picked\\_up\\_a\\_hitchhiker/c18z0z2/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/elal2/have_you_ever_picked_up_a_hitchhiker/c18z0z2/)