

“Filling the food bags together” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
August 27, 2017 Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Romans 12:1-8

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Just a few weeks ago we packed bags full of food for 160 families. If you stayed to help, you may have noticed that Kevin had the food laid out so that those filling bags could walk in a big circle picking up individual food items to put in the bag each person was carrying. I know several of you made so many trips in that circle that it was a wonder you didn't get dizzy! Because everyone worked together, the 160 bags got filled in a timely manner without a bunch of chaos and confusion.

What you may not have realized was that another group of people Kevin had recruited unloaded from Kevin's trailer all the food Kevin had acquired for the distribution and set it out in an order that would make our job of filling the bags easier. You know the phrase, 'it takes a village.' In the food-bag-filling business, it takes a whole lot of strong people before the village can even start to work filling food bags!

Of course, obtaining the food, the preparation in advance of filling the bags and the bag filling was only part of the total process. The bags had to be delivered. Drivers and their vehicles took the bags to the recipients of the food. And well before that someone had to figure out how many food bags would be needed at each distribution stop. We didn't want any families that needed food to come to get a bag and find that all the bags were given out.

Thank you to all of you for your part in acquiring and filling and distributing the 160 food bags.

Why did I tell you that story? Our church's involvement in providing food to the hungry illustrates Paul's words in today's scripture from Romans. We are one body with many members and not all members have the same function. Our church members make up the body of Christ here at Community Presbyterian Cathedral City. It is through the individual God-given talents of the members of the body that we can function as one body – in the case noted – to distribute food to the hungry. We worked together and depended on each other to get the job done.

In the USA today, individuality seems to be valued over the idea of people working together – though, thankfully, I see that changing some in business. But on the whole, Americans idealize the lone ranger who gets the job done through absolute, singular strength. We seem to have a fascination with the story of an individual who has 'made it' through exercising his or her sheer will.

This emphasis on the individual has been adopted by many in the Christian faith. People talk about their personal relationship with Jesus. It's me and Jesus. This attitude of some Christians is a case where society has influenced some churches. The writer of Romans would not agree with our society's, nor some church's, fascination with being a lone ranger.

Lest you think I'm violating one of my points in last week's sermon, let me say that I'm not criticizing these lone ranger Christians. These individuals accomplish much good work and

I'm pleased to see that. What I want to point out today, though, is the importance of working together as one body. By working together, depending on each other, we can accomplish more than if we work alone.

Paul gives us a few pointers on how to best work together and depend on each other to get the job done.

Paul comments that Christians are not to think more highly of themselves than they ought and to think with sober judgement. That means not to think we have more talents and gifts than we really do. Specifically, it means that each of us needs to identify our limits and our abilities and how, using those abilities and recognizing those limits, we can best fit into the body. If you know that you're not good at organizing, then make sure you work with someone who is. If you are good at cooking then volunteer to help where that skill can be useful. So, think with sober judgement so you know where you can best fit in to work together to get a lot more work done for Jesus.

I'd like to comment on one more phrase Paul writes in this scripture selection from Romans that may have puzzled some of you. Paul wrote: **Each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.** What does this mean? Faith, for Paul, is a like our gifts. God gives us different gifts. The world would be terribly boring if we all had the same gifts!

Likewise, God gives each of us different measures of faith. And that's not something for us to judge. We all have different measures of faith and each of us is to use our faith to best serve God. We are not all equal faith-wise if you think about it. You may know someone who has a faith you admire and that faith inspires you to have a deeper faith. You may know someone who has a deep faith that is reflected in her or his prayer life. Another may have a faith that is easily shared.

How did our church feed 160 families, donate and fill backpacks with school supplies for 22, have a VBS to reach the kids in the neighborhood for Christ and sponsor a new worshipping community? All those activities took faith to vision them, but all those activities took our church family's varied God-given talents and gifts to make them happen. We are stronger when we work together. You've proven that time after time. Keep it up.

I particularly like the Message translation of these verses on working together and depending on each other. **In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. . . . Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of [Christ's] body. . . . So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.**

I've said this to you before so it won't be new to some of you. Look at the person on your right. Look at the person on our left. Those people have gifts that can help you grow in faith and those people have talents that complement yours – so together you can do the work Christ has directed us to do – to feed the poor, to care for widows and fatherless, to care for the needy. Depend on them using your sober judgement.

Working together, depending on each other, works. Paul encourages it. We've done it. Let's keep doing it!