

Worthy of Honor  
Nashville UCC, January 13, 2019

*“Well, ya’ got trouble my friends;  
I say trouble right here, trouble right here in River City:  
trouble with a capital T, and that rhymes with P, and that stands for Pool!”*

You might recognize that song from the Broadway musical *The Music Man*. The character who sings it is trying to pin all the city’s troubles on a pool hall that has just opened in the center of town. St. Paul could have sung that song himself, although it might have gone something like this:

*“Well, ya’ got trouble my friends,  
I say trouble right here, trouble right here in Corinth:  
Trouble with a capital T, and that rhymes with P,  
And that stands for People who can’t get along with one another!”*

Paul had started the church in Corinth; and when he left it to continue his ministry to the Gentiles, he assumed that the members of its congregation knew how to behave themselves. But it didn’t work out quite that way; and so Paul wrote the letter that we now call *First Corinthians* to remind them how to behave!

This was problem. Some members had the ability to speak in tongues – to speak in the language of the angels themselves – and to deliver messages to the congregation that were straight from God! That was a very glamorous ability; and all those people started believing that they were better than the other church members who only hosted worship in their homes, or handed out food to the hungry, or took care of the sick. When Paul heard that some people were saying “I’m better than you are” instead of saying “Let’s work together”, he wasted no time in setting them straight. He told them, in effect, “If you think that you’re all that and a bag of chips just because you can speak in tongues, you’re mistaken! God gives all kinds of spiritual gifts; and speaking in tongues is just one of them. Some people are wise; some people are healers; other people can discern the signs of the times. One gift is no better than any other! If you start thinking that some gifts are better, you’re going to start believing that one *person* is better; and that will drive people out of your congregation quicker than ice melts in the summertime! Don’t go there! Just... don’t go there!”

And then, he compares the body of Christ – the church congregation – to a human body whose parts all have to work together if that body is going to be healthy. That’s the part of I Corinthians that I read this morning (12:12-27). We might care more about our eyes than about our elbows; but if we suddenly lost our elbows, we’d be in a heap of hurt! Just as all the parts of our bodies need to work together, every person should be working with every other person for the good of all. Paul even says with a wink, “Why, we care a lot about the parts of our bodies that we don’t show to anyone else!” No part of our physical body is more worthy of honor than any other; and no person in the body of Christ is more worthy of honor, either. It was a hard sell, though, those folks in Corinth had grown up in a culture that insisted that some folks were more worthy of honor than others. Men were more worthy than women; women were more worthy than children; and everybody was more worthy than slaves.

Aren’t you glad that we don’t live in a culture like that? Except that we do. We live in a culture just like that. We hear all the time that some people are more worthy than others. We judge worthiness by skin color, intelligence, gender, educational level, and occupation. Think for a moment about who our society judges as worthy of honor. Pro athletes are worthy. So are stars of movies and television; and folks who are highly successful financially: the leaders of businesses, and super-models. But there are

lots of worthy folks who are never honored: hard-working people who care about the common good and do their best day after day. We all know who they are. They're teachers, cooks, restaurant servers, and plumbers. Now, if all those folks suddenly disappeared, we would be in a world of hurt! But we usually ignore all of them; because... well... we judge that they aren't quite as worthy as other people are.

I have a dear friend whose father owned a plumbing business in my home town for many years. His father was as honest as the day is long; and he knew his business! Everybody knew that if you called him, he would fix whatever was wrong; and he would make sure that the job was done right. His son took over the business when his father was no longer able to do the work; and he continued the reputation that his father had worked so hard to earn. One day, I ran into him and remarked that he had done all right for himself. Everybody in town knew him; and everybody in town trusted him. But he just said sadly, "Oh, I didn't do so well. I'm just a plumber." I answered in a heartbeat, "And when my sink is stopped up, I'm mighty glad that you are!" The truth is that everyone who does his or her job well is worthy of honor; but we insist that some people are better than others simply because of their occupation.

Sadly, this kind of status-seeking infects even the church. Ask any church-goer who is most worthy of honor. My guess is that they'll name the pastor, the youth worker, the church treasurer, and maybe a Sunday school teacher. But the ushers, the custodians, the members of the women's circle, and the members of ministry teams? "Oh, yeah," they'll say, "they do things too, but they're not *really* important." But that's not what Paul says! Paul says that ALL members of the body of Christ are worthy of honor, because ALL have an important service to do on behalf of all the others!

Let me tell you about Bob. Bob was a small, soft spoken man, someone who was easy to overlook. No one would ever choose Bob as being someone worthy of honor. But Bob performed a service to the church faithfully for many years: he ran the dishwasher following church dinners. The cooks and servers never needed to stay and clean up, because Bob took care of all that. Month after month, dinner after dinner, Bob ran the dishwasher. He claimed that job as his ministry in the church; and he was proud to do it. Was he worthy of honor? You bet he was! If heaven has a dishwasher, I'm quite sure that Bob is up there running it right now so that the angels who worked so hard on cooking and serving the dinners can go home and put their feet up afterwards.

Are you worthy of honor? Do you tidy the sanctuary, or send cards to home-bound parishioners? Maybe you visit members in assisted living homes, or serve on a ministry team. Maybe you help to make peanut brittle, or help to clean up the recreation park in the spring. My friends, if you do *anything* for the good of others, you are worthy of honor! God appreciates everything that you do – and this morning, I want to make sure that you know that we do, too!