

A Movement for Wholeness
I Corinthians 12:4-11
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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“From a distance the world looks blue and green
And the snow capped mountains white.
From a distance the ocean meets the stream
And the eagle takes to flight.

“From a distance there is harmony
And it echoes through the land.
It's the voice of hope,
It's the voice of peace,
It's the voice of every man.

“From a distance we all have enough
And no one is in need,
And there are no guns, no bombs and no disease
No hungry mouths to feed.

“From a distance we are instruments
Marching in a common band,
Playing songs of hope,
Playing songs of peace,
They are the songs of every man...

“From a distance you look like my friend
Even though we are at war.
From a distance I just cannot comprehend
What all this fighting is for.
From a distance there is harmony
And it echoes through the land
And it's the hope of hopes
It's the love of loves

It's the heart of every man” (“From a Distance,” performed by Bette Midler, written by Julie Gold, published by: Songtrust Ave, Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group, Warner Chappell Music, Inc.).

You might recognize those words from the song “From a Distance” written by Julie Gold and released by Bette Midler in 1990. The other piece of that song is a refrain that says, “God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us from a distance.”

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Now I have to admit that while I love the sentiment and the hope that I hear in most of the lyrics of this song, I have always struggled a bit with that sentence, “God is watching us from a distance.”

After all, did you hear those lyrics? From a distance, things look lovely...people are getting along...struggles are erased. And yet, up and close and personal, for those of us who are living this life, it all too often looks very different.

And I want a God who knows that. I want a God who is in the up-close-and-personal of our lives, who sees the struggles that we and our siblings live with, who companions with us in war and hunger and strife.

So, I struggled, every time I heard that song - which was often, especially in the early '90s.

And yet, perhaps it's not about a divine recliner in some far off place that allows God to pretend everything is okay while sitting separately from our struggles.

Perhaps instead, the idea of God watching from a distance *is* a word of hope.

Perhaps it says that even when things are difficult, even when people are struggling, even when there is division and polarization and war...*even then* God holds out hope and sees the possibilities of a world made whole.

And if God can remain committed to that possibility, then perhaps we can as well.

Because, friends, wholeness is certainly God's intention. It permeates the creation story as God's instinct is to create a good and whole world where there is peace and harmony. And throughout scripture, even as many conflicts are reflected, the invitation toward wholeness remains clear.

And yet, we know that we humans have a special struggle with this concept or at least with the reality of it.

Too often selfishness and greed...fear and prejudice...jealousy and judgment...and so many other temptations get in the way of our living in ways that help create wholeness.

And yet we are reminded that all that we have is for the common good.

Did you hear that in the scripture?

See, I think we too often read right past it. When we hear this passage from I Corinthians we hear it open by talking about varieties of gifts and we begin to anticipate that list...gifts like faith and healing, wisdom and knowledge, and more. And often we begin to wonder which gifts we have. Or we begin the modern questioning of what is really meant when there is reference to speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

And so, we often miss verse seven which reads, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*" (I Corinthians 12:7, NRSV).

We tend to do the same thing later in this chapter as Paul uses the image of the body to help the Corinthians understand what the church is called to be. We get caught up in this discussion of one body part telling another they don't matter, or one body part assuming it doesn't matter. We have conversations about ranking gifts in value order. We again have conversations about what role we play in the body. But there we too often miss verse 26 which reads, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (I Corinthians 12:26, NRSV).

Paul reminds the Corinthians - and us - that we are created for community, that we are only whole and complete when we are working for the common good, that the condition each one of us finds ourselves in makes a difference to all of the others.

So, friends, what would it look like for us to be active participants in making the world whole? In bringing wholeness not just for ourselves, but for all people and all of creation?

I suspect we don't ask that question often enough. And, especially as members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we should be asking that question. After all, soon after Sharon Watkins was elected as our General Minister and President in 2005 she called together a vision team. And in their conversations it became clear that one of the things that they needed to do was to help we who are Disciples remember who we are.

And so, out of their process came an identity statement that reads, "We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."

We, who are part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), have claimed explicitly that we are a movement for wholeness.

So, what are we doing about it? Do we even understand what it means? And are we willing to expand our understanding?

Our Jewish friends know that the Hebrew word, “Shalom” means more than is captured when we translate it as “peace.” The truth, as Sharon Watkins explained in her book *Whole*, is that, “shalom depicts a more complex notion. It comes from a root word that means ‘whole,’ as in ‘complete’ or ‘safe,’ either personally or within society.¹¹ Shalom does not indicate a passive harmony or mere absence of conflict, as the word *peace* sometimes does. Shalom evokes a situation that is actively good, where the circumstances offer opportunities for individuals and communities to flourish. Shalom implies that God did not intend life to be a zero-sum game where one person moves forward only at another’s expense” (Sharon Watkins, *Whole*, St Louis: Chalice Press, 2014; page 48).

Shalom...working for the common good...creating a world where all experience completeness and safety, where all get to flourish.

This is what wholeness looks like.

So, how do we live out our claim that we are a “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world”?

Perhaps, as Sharon Watkins wrote, “It starts close to home. In small increments, Jesus’ followers reach out across barriers with acts of love, expanding the neighborhood...But those small beginnings engage the process of changing the world” (Watkins, 57-8).

And so we feed those who are hungry...and we advocate for just policies around food insecurity.

We march with people of color who have experienced harm at the hands of our racist society...and we frequent their businesses and move into diverse neighborhoods.

We ask fewer questions about what our wealth can buy us and ask more questions about how our wealth can help build a more just and whole world in which all people can flourish.

We show up for our neighbors who are in harm's way, being willing to step into danger even when we have the choice not to.

We share our possessions and build houses, we welcome teens who have been rejected and learn a second language in order to serve immigrants, we reduce our carbon footprint and make a commitment to live more justly recognizing that the poor are often the first to be impacted by our own bad habits.

We look in the eyes of each person we meet and we see a child of God.

Friends, we are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

We know the truth that our world is fragmented. May we live in such a way that we are actively claiming, with all that we are and all that we have, the truth and possibility of wholeness as well. Amen.