

## **It's Such a Good Feeling**

**1 Corinthians 12:1-13**

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My first Sunday as a resident of Waco, TX, I did what most freshman Baylor students do the first Sunday of the fall semester—go to church. Baylor is a Baptist University, and so many students want to start out on the right foot in more ways than one their first few days on campus. Unlike many students, though I had done some research. I had looked at various church websites, read their “about” pages, their staff pages, checked to see what flavor of Baptist the churches were, and I had talked to people who I trusted that knew the Waco church scene.

There was a church that a popular Christian musician had helped start. It had been huge when the musician and his band led worship every Sunday, but it had since dwindled a bit. The church was known to be a bit hipster and a lot quirky. I'd heard they didn't do things like all the other churches in town. Their building had previously been an HEB grocery store. They were having a new student pancake breakfast that first Sunday and so I decided that I would go and check out University Baptist—which everyone only calls UBC.

I walked in the front doors of UBC and it was unlike any church I had been before. It was a Baptist church, but there was a statue of Saint Francis. There was a coffee room immediately to the left of the front doors with the most diverse array of mugs I have ever seen—from a mug shaped like Darth Vader's mask to a delicate mug with an intricate china pattern. The walls were painted blue with various gold stars, and one of the pastors was there in jeans and flip-flops to greet new students and show us where the pancakes were.

I don't remember all the details of that first worship service. There was a band that led worship and it was loud, but the songs were thoughtful, theologically deep, and meaningful. The sermon intrigued me and was not boring—which is very important. The people were welcoming to me, but I could also tell that they really knew each other. I could see the genuine community that existed. I sat to the left of the chancel (the only time I ever sat in the spot) and I remember a moment at some point in the service where I knew in my gut that this was my church and these would be my people.

UBC was the only church I ever attended in Waco (aside from the Greek Orthodox church, Hindu temple, synagogue, and mosque I visited during a world religions class in my junior year), and this quirky little church that cared about art, encouraged questions, welcomed doubt, and accepted people as their whole selves, became one of the most formative and important places in my life. It was the first church I ever interned at. It was the first church committee I had ever been a part of. I joined an intergenerational small group, which they called “mi casas,” my freshman year and every Thursday night for four years I spent with them. The church turned 20 in my junior year but instead of having a large celebration for their 20<sup>th</sup>, they waited and had a big party for their 21<sup>st</sup>—complete with an end-of-worship balloon drop, moon bounces, and

karaoke. When I graduated, my mi casa came and sat through the hours-long ceremony just so they could scream at the top of their lungs when I crossed the stage.

As you can see, because I've been going on for a while now, I could talk about this place for a very long time. But the last thing I will tell you about it, is one of my favorite things about UBC—their highest, holiest day of the year. It happens every year in early May. With no disrespect to Easter or Christmas, it is the most important Sunday on their calendar—Mister Rogers Sunday. Each May as graduation approaches, UBC celebrates their graduates with an emphasis on Mister Rogers. Every service begins with the song “Won't You Be My Neighbor” as one of the pastors, Toph, walks out, sits down in a chair, changes his shoes and puts on a cardigan.

The “sermon” portion of the worship service is a documentary PBS put out years ago narrated by Michael Keaton. As the documentary went on, you could hear more and more people start to sniffle. The documentary shows an episode where Mister Rogers sings the song “It's You I Like” with a young boy named Jeff Erlanger. Jeff had several disabilities and had had some spinal surgeries. Jeff used an electric wheelchair. Fred Rogers and Jeff filmed an unscripted and unrehearsed 10-minute segment where viewers learned about Jeff and learned about his wheelchair. Then they sing “It's You I Like” together. That scene alone was enough for everyone in the sanctuary to be crying, but then the documentary cuts to the 1999 Television Academy Hall of Fame induction. Fred Rogers was getting inducted, and to his great surprise, Jeff Erlanger comes out to do the induction. Fred Rogers was so surprised he leapt up out of his seat and ran up on stage to his old friend Jeff. Each year after that scene, every single person in the sanctuary was weeping, it caused even the last hold outs to cry.

The purpose of Mister Rogers' Sunday at UBC is really similar to Mister Rogers' own purpose, UBC wanted students of all ages who were graduating from kindergarten to PHD programs, to know that they were special exactly as God made them and that they could make the world a better place just by being who God created them to be and using the unique gifts given to them by the Spirit.

In our scripture this morning, the apostle Paul is trying to get across a similar message, albeit in a very different style than Mister Rogers. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is telling his readers that their gifts, whatever they are, are needed. No one gift is better than another, all gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and activated by God for the common good. Paul is writing this because the church in Corinth had begun assigning value and importance to some gifts over others.

The church were dividing themselves on a socioeconomic basis. Those in the congregation who had ample material resources were dividing themselves from those who did not. If you had plenty of money then surely the Spirit favored you over and above those without. They were using this logic to neglect their neighbors in need. In the previous chapter, Paul chastises the church in Corinth for abusing the Lord's Supper. Those who were hungry and in need were not

getting to partake. They were denied Christ's table and humiliated. "What do you want me to say to you? Do you want me to commend you for this abuse? I don't." Paul says in his letter.

Paul sees a clear need to take the Corinthians back to the basics, because it seems that they had forgotten their call as followers of Jesus. They seem to have forgotten that their holy calling was to stand with the least, the last, and the left-out. They had forgotten that those folks mattered too. By ignoring and excluding those folks, they were saying that God chooses some above others. Paul calls them out and says, that you cannot be the one body of Christ without the bodies that don't look like yours, without the people that might have very different gifts and lives than you.

In my second year of divinity school, I served a church for the duration of the academic year. My primary responsibility was to provide pastoral care and leadership to a Wednesday evening program for adults with developmental disabilities called the Sonshine Class. Each Wednesday consisted of dinner, a craft, Bible study, and music. Once a month, however, the group partook in communion and it often fell to the intern to preside at the table. Typically, the volunteers from the church served communion, but I wanted members of the class to be the ones who served. So, I approached four members of the class—Terry, Stephanie, Dana, and Charles—to ask if they would be willing to serve communion.

They were willing. And as they served communion, something really special happened. As Terry tore the bread and handed it to each person in the room, he did not say, "This is the body of Christ for you," instead he said, "That's you." You see what Terry knew and what he told everyone when he handed them the bread, was that they were members of Christ's body. No matter who they were, what gifts they had or didn't have, though there were many people in the room, he knew that they were all members of the body of Christ. "That's you," Terry said. "That's you."

At the very beginning of our passage today, Paul writes, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. In the Christian context and understanding this is what we confess before we are plunged into the baptismal waters. The baptizer asks the baptizee "What is your confession of faith?" "Jesus is Lord." For the earliest Christians, this confession was true for every single aspect of their lives.

Jesus is Lord, and they were not. Jesus is Lord and the Roman government was not. Jesus is Lord and the powers and principalities were not. Jesus is Lord and the social hierarchies that had them splitting themselves up based on socioeconomic status and denying communion to the hungry was not. Before anything else in their life, following Jesus was first. It was their primary identity, and it informed every single aspect of their life no matter where they went or what they did.

It should be no different for us. Jesus is Lord, Jesus is God, and we are not—what a relief!

It's such a good feeling to know that. It's such a good feeling to know that we each have been given different, needed gifts to go out into the world to be the body of Christ. It's such a good feeling, a very good feeling to know you can always help to make each day a special way by being who God created you to be, using your own unique, special Spirit-given gifts.

It's such a good feeling.