

“Effective: Two Are Better Than One”

BY PASTOR JOHN VICK

Asbury United Methodist Church

February 7, 2021

- Well, I’m not sure if you’re aware, but there is a football game on tonight. A big one.
 - Tonight at 6:30, the Kansas City Chiefs will play the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the 55th Super Bowl.
 - Now, by a show of hands, how many of you are cheering for the Chiefs tonight? Alright, how about the Buccaneers?
 - That’s great. I did notice that, not everyone raised their hand. You all are like me... You’re just cheering for the commercials!
 - You don’t care who wins or who loses, you just want to watch some funny commercials that you can talk about with your friends tomorrow.

- Well I thought I would bring up the Super Bowl, because we are continuing on in our sermon series titled “Effective.” We’ve been looking at Stephen Covey’s *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and relating them to our lives as people of faith.
 - And when I think of a group of people who are effective, I think of the two teams that are in the Super Bowl tonight.
 - Just think, these two teams were up against the best professional football athletes in the country. They went head-to-head against the best teams in the playoffs.
 - And, at the end of the day, they came out on top. They were the most effective teams, beating all of the others.
 - The habits of the Chiefs and Buccaneers led to them being in the Super Bowl tonight.

- So, let's briefly look back at where we've been the last couple of weeks in this series.
- 1) We began this series with habit #1: Be Proactive. Let's not be reactive (tossed to and fro by the wind and waves) and let's not be inactive (simply, doing nothing). Instead, let's "get things started!" Let's take initiative.
 - 2) The second week, we looked at "Beginning with the end in mind." We talked about the importance of playing the long game. Knowing where we are going.
 - 3) In week three, we had a good message about "putting the first things first." Let's not let the urgent matters keep us from what is really important.
 - 4) In week 4, we learned that win/win scenarios are actually possible. We don't have to have win/lose or lose/win or lose/lose scenarios all of the time.
 - 5) Finally, last week, we looked at James 1, where we read to "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to show anger." We have two ears, and one mouth, so we should seek to understand before being understood.

- Today, we look at the sixth habit. It's one word: Synergize.
- Stephen Covey gives a succinct definition for synergy in his book: "What is synergy? Simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It means that the relationship which the parts have to each other is a part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part."
 - When we look at examples of effectiveness around us, synergy is always present.

- Let's look back at our opening example of the two teams in the Super Bowl.
 - Those teams had to demonstrate synergy. They had to work together, they had to view themselves as a TEAM – or else everything would fall apart. They wouldn't be effective; they would be ineffective.
 - So the offense and the defense and the special teams and the coaches and the trainers... all of them had to work together. Synergy.

- But maybe you aren't a "sports person" and so that illustration doesn't connect well with you. I certainly am not that big into sports, either. But, like I said earlier, I enjoy watching the Super Bowl commercials.
 - And what's really fascinating, is that those commercials required synergy as they were produced. A large group of people had to work together to produce them.
 - There's the marketing team at a company, working with actors and actresses in the commercials, working with the tech team, working with the music team, and the editors, and on and on...
 - All that to say, whether you are more focused on the sports teams or the commercials tonight, synergy is present.

- We see synergy, or really the lack thereof, going on at the church of Corinth in the New Testament.
 - As Paul is writing the letter of 1st Corinthians, the Corinthian church is experiencing some major problems. They are a deeply, deeply divided congregation.
 - There were strong divisions going on in the church. Some said that they "followed Paul." Others in the church said they "followed Apollos."

-Additionally, members in the Corinthian church were suing each other! They were having lawsuits among themselves. Talk about division!

-We can see from Paul's letter, that the Corinthian church was dysfunctional and divided, in many ways.

-I got a chuckle out of what NT Wright had to say about this church: "If there was one church that caused Paul to pull his hair out and made him age before his time, it was probably the 'church of God in Corinth.'"

- But one of the many things I appreciate about Paul, is how proactive he was. Paul was a proactive person!

-He could have easily been inactive in this situation, and said, "Oh well. It is what it is. The Corinthian church is just a difficult church. I tried." But he didn't do that.

-Or, Paul also could have easily been reactive. He could have heard about the divisions going on there, and gotten angry, and attacked the people. But he didn't do that, either.

- Instead, he was proactive. He said, "What can I do? I can write the Corinthian church a letter. I can address these problems and point them to Christ." And that's exactly what Paul did.

-The concepts of unity and synergy are found all throughout the book of 1st Corinthians, but we see them emphasized most clearly in chapter 12.

-So, out of the reverence we have in our hearts for the Word of God, let's stand together and read these verses out loud:

-1 Cor. 12:27-31 /// The word of God for the people of God.

- When we read the first verse, I hope some of us made the connection to Stephen Covey's definition of synergy.

-Verse 27 reads, “Now you [plural, you all] are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

And what was Covey’s definition of synergy? “Synergy means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

-See, Paul was writing about the concept of synergy almost 2,000 years before Covey was born! Paul “got it.” He understood that the whole body working together, is better than divided, individual parts.

- So, in 1 Corinthians 12, we can see what SYNERGY in COMMUNITY looks like.

- Specifically, we can see what synergy in the Church, in Christian community, looks like.

- There’s a lot we can say about that, but this morning, I just want to lift up two keys for understanding synergy in the church. And these come right out of our text today.

① Key #1: Each member is uniquely different... and that’s good!

- In fact, each member of the Body of Christ is different in a lot of ways. This is certainly something that Paul acknowledges repeatedly throughout 1st Corinthians 12.

- Let’s look back a little earlier, at verses 12-13.

- (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)**

- We may not catch it now, but those words were revolutionary when they were written! Think how bold, how courageous, Paul had to be, to say “Jews, Greeks, slaves, free people... We’re all one! We are all baptized into one body and drink of the same Spirit.”

-From the very birth of the Church, we see people from different cultures, different backgrounds, different socio-economic standings, find unity and synergy in the Holy Spirit.

- And today, the same should be true for the church.

-It excites me, when I look around this room of people. Or think about everyone watching online right now.

-And how we all have different stories. We all have different experiences. We all have different backgrounds, different upbringings, different perspectives.

- And yet, here we are! All together, worshipping side-by-side.

- To be honest, I don't know anywhere else we could find this in society. I don't know where else we could find a community of people, from different generations and backgrounds, coming together to do life together. Coming together, to worship.

-And so, we all have different stories and backgrounds, and that's a good thing.

- In addition, though, to each of us having different stories and backgrounds, we each have different gifts and services.

-We see this so well in 1st Corinthians 12. Paul, like a rapid-fire canon, asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?"

-The implied answer is, "No!" We all have different gifts and services and activities, and that, my friends, is a good thing.

-That is important for synergy to take place.

- Let me make one more sports illustration. Who is the quarterback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers? (Tom Brady).

-And, how many Super Bowls has he been in? (9)

-People talk about him being one of the greatest, if not the greatest, quarterbacks of all time. He has a very special set of athletic skills.

-But, what were to happen if every player on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers had the same gifts as Tom Brady? If they were exactly like him. What would happen?

-Well, it wouldn't be pretty, to say the least. You'd have 11 players on the field who can throw the ball, but no players to catch it. And no players to hold back the defense. Nothing would get done!

- Well in a similar way, each of us as members in Christ's body are given special and unique spiritual gifts. And these gifts make us "better together."

-Also, something about these gifts, is that they were specifically chosen for you by the Holy Spirit.

-In verse 11, Paul writes, "All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."

- Let me ask you. What's the best gift you've ever received from someone? Odds are, it wasn't something generic or impersonal.

-Instead, it was probably something that someone picked out specifically for you. This person knows about you, knows your interests and likes, and got this gift specifically for you.

-It may not have been much, but you could tell the person who gave it to you knows you very well.

-Well, I find great comfort in knowing that the Holy Spirit, the One who knows us better than we know ourselves, saw us, and knew us, and gave us the gifts that we have. Wow.

② Key #2: We are one body.

-Yes, we may have different backgrounds and stories. We may have different gifts and passions and callings. But, at our core as Christians, we are all one body.

- As I was thinking about this concept this week, I thought of our amazing orchestra here at Asbury.

-I am so amazed every time I hear our orchestra play at 9:30am. I didn't grow up in a church with an orchestra, like probably many of us, and I am so thankful to be here at Asbury, where we have such a phenomenal orchestra.

-And I am not going to pretend like I know much about music, but I so appreciate how all of these different instruments, come together and make such a beautiful, heavenly sound.

-These many different instruments and sounds all come together, resulting in one beautiful masterpiece. The same is true for the church.

-We, as individual members, are all one body. The Body of Christ.

- And in the Body of Christ, we need each other. We need relationships. We need friendships.

-I appreciated what Pastor Tom wrote in our sermon journals this week: "We all need coaches, counselors, classmates, encouragers, family, friends, leaders, mentors, teachers, and teammates to help us." – Dr. Tom Harrison.

-These relationships are invaluable.

- When I was in the eighth grade, I first felt the calling on my life into the pastoral ministry. I didn't know exactly what that looked like then, but I knew that I was called.

-That next year, God brought a person into my life that helped me discern my calling and realize that God was calling me to be a Methodist pastor.

-This person was Michael Shepherd. He became our pastor at Inola UMC when I was a freshman in high school.

- Let me tell you, Pastor Michael poured into me and gave me so many opportunities.

-He always let me fill the pulpit for him when he was out of town, we would occasionally team-preach together, I got to go on hospital visits and home visits with him. All as a little high schooler! **This is a picture of us together...**

-I learned so much about life and ministry from him. I got so much experience from being around him.

-And so, once I became a pastor in 2019, I felt ready and prepared. Not because of how good I was – but because of relationships like this one.

- I'll forever be grateful for the relationship that I had, and still have, with Pastor Michael.

-God brought him into my life for a reason, and God blessed that relationship many times over.

-And so, church, I hope that you have meaningful relationships like that in your own life. Two truly is better than one. I hope that you have coaches and mentors and teachers and friends. I hope that you experience the synergy that we're talking about today.

- You know, there are several factors that can hinder and stop synergy from taking place, but I think the biggest one is a refusal to trust others.

- One of the biggest roadblocks to synergy is a refusal to trust other people.
- Covey writes about how tragic that is. How much of a waste it is, to never allow yourself to trust another person.
- That's not what we were created for. Of course, we should be wise and discerning in these matters, but it is a sad, sad thing to never another human being.

- In writing about this, James Bryan Smith says, "Doubt is a weapon of mass destruction for relational connection. If we doubt our spouse is faithful, or our boss has our best interest at heart, or our friend is truly reliable, that relationship is in jeopardy. And relational connection is our most important need. We can be talented and intelligent, but if we have no deep relationships we are lost. Our bank account can be massive and our waistline tiny, but if we do not have meaningful relationships in which we are known and loved, we have nothing. The key to relational connection? Trust."

- If we want to experience this kind of synergy we read about in the Bible, we have to trust. Again, it is a sad, sad ordeal, to never trust another person.

- We can even look at the life and the prayers of Jesus throughout the Gospels, and see how he valued this kind of synergy and unity among his disciples.
- One of my favorite chapters in all of the Bible is John 17. The entire chapter, all 26 verses, is Jesus praying to the Father for his disciples. Both the disciples that were with him, but also those who would later become disciples.

-We see Jesus praying for his disciples' protection and sanctification and witness and so on.

-However, at the forefront of Jesus' prayer for his disciples is unity.

- This is a brief section from Jesus' prayer in John 17:

-(John 17:22-23)

-Again, how beautiful and powerful it is, to know that Jesus prayed for our unity. For us to be one, as He and the Father are one.

-Having unity and togetherness and synergy in the church is important to Jesus, who is the Head of the church.

- But what continually amazes me about Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17, is that the prayer is also "outward-focused."

-Notice what Jesus said the result of his disciples' unity and synergy would be:

-"so that the world may know that you [Father] have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

- Church, the world is watching.

-And so we have a choice. Are we going to be just like the world, divided and angry? OR,

-Are we going to reflect the glory of God, by being unified and loving.

-I think it's interesting, that in John's Gospel, Jesus notes that two things that make us stand out as disciples of Jesus, is our LOVE and our UNITY.

- In 2011, the Christian band Casting Crowns released a song called “City on a Hill,” which is a reference to Jesus saying that we are a “city on a hill” in the Sermon on the Mount.

-I want to read a few lines from that song,

“Did you hear of the city on the hill? Said one old man to the other, It once shined bright, and it would be shining still, But they all started turning on each other. You see the poets thought the dancers were shallow, And the soldiers thought the poets were weak, And the elders saw the young ones as foolish, And the rich man never heard the poor man speak. But one by one, they ran away, With their made up minds to leave it all behind, And the light began to fade, In the City on the Hill, the City on the Hill, But it was the rhythm of the dancers, That gave the poets life, It was the spirit of the poets, That gave the soldiers strength to fight, It was fire of the young ones, It was the wisdom of the old, It was the story of the poor man, That needed to be told.”

- Church, life is so much better together. Life is so much better, with synergy.

-And sure, synergy may get a team to the Super Bowl, which is nice and all.

-But how much more important, is having synergy in our mission of “Helping others follow Jesus.”

-And in this moment, we have a special opportunity to respond to and affirm that truth, as we come to the communion table.

-Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.