

Text: I Corinthians 12:27

Theme: The Church - A Portrait in Motion

January 24, 2016

How many of you played or at least remember the game, "Mr. Potato Head"? Unless I grew up in an unusual setting, most of us over fifty remember, at least vaguely remember, the game where you had to build Mr. Potato Head including eyes, ears, hands, and feet. As I looked at our text, Mr. Potato Head came to mind and the more I thought about it, the more it seemed to provide imagery for learning about our place in the Portrait of the Church

I. God has given us a significant role in the portrait of His church. A. Even so, some forget their place in that portrait. 1. Some act like the Lone Ranger. "I don't need anybody else. I don't need the church. I don't need those people because I can do it all by myself!" In all truth, that's about as ridiculous as Mr. Potato Head thinking he can build himself. Yet as ridiculous as it may sound sitting here, it occurs frequently out there beyond these walls. We give it honorable sounding names like "independence," or "self-starter" as we attempt to justify our actions. Yet, no matter how long we try, the body of Christ, the church doesn't function well with the Lone Ranger mentality.

2. Others think they are indispensable. "If I'm not involved, it will never get done right. I know how it's done and I'm the only one who knows how it's done!" Maybe we don't hear those words out loud, but we observe actions that scream, "You need me. You won't survive without me!" The various parts of Mr. Potato Head may appear indispensable to the game, but beyond that, no one is indispensable, not even in the church. If you want to know how indispensable you are, take a five-gallon bucket and fill it with water. Stick your hand all the way to the bottom of the bucket and then remove it. The hole you leave behind will demonstrate how indispensable you are.

3. On the opposite extreme, still others think they are not needed at all. Mr. Potato Head can probably get along just fine if one arm goes missing or if someone loses one of his ears. But in the body of Christ, things are different. Paul makes it clear, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Not only does he say that you are needed, that you are necessary, but he goes one step further as he says that you, individually, you, personally, you, John, you, Mary, you are a necessary part of the body. You can think otherwise; you can feel otherwise, but the facts don't change. You are part of the portrait and that reality will never change.

B. Although we sometimes forget our place, how do we function as the church in motion? 1. Acknowledge that you belong. It was obvious that all the parts belonged to the game, but it needs to be equally obvious that each one of us, regardless of age, abilities, or anything else belong in the portrait of the church. Interestingly, studies have shown that kids join gangs for one primary reason. They want to belong somewhere. Within us, is that need to belong and within the body of Christ, you belong. You have a place, an important role. You can argue, but you will always lose. You belong because the Master Designer created you to belong in His church.

2. Recognize that you are necessary. Could you play Mr. Potato Head if there were no potato head? Of course not! Can we be the church God designed us to be

if you believe you are just part of the woodwork? Paul would say, "Of course not!" We need you and every gift and talent you possess. We may stumble along without you, but stumbling along isn't God's portrait of the church. "Would we recognize ourselves in a month if everyone accepted that they were needed and functioned based on that truth?" People may have treated you or acted like you were unimportant, but they were wrong. You are necessary and needed. Period.

3. We believe that all parts are equal. In Mr. Potato Head, we know that the head was most important, but in the body of Christ, all parts are equal. Paul clarifies that for us as he says, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'." Within God's church, every person is not only needed, but of equal value. Whether you've been a member for 40 years or 4 days, whether you've been in a leadership role or never served in a leadership role, the fact doesn't change. You and you and you and I. All of us are equal in value. If you think you have more or less value, Paul would say, "Revise your thinking." To be the church, we view every person on an equal plane.

4. We believe that all parts are different by design. For the most part, the pieces of Mr. Potato Head are different. Likewise, each one of us are different by design. It's not accidental that some are more talented in music while others are more talented at teaching. It's intentional. Because we are different, we need to step up to the plate and offer our differences, offer our unique gifts for the benefit of the church. Like the body, we need different. But different only benefits the church when we acknowledge our differences and put our differences to work for the benefit of the body. Different, but complimentary. That's how God designed us.

5. We choose to work in harmony. If you want Mr. Potato Head to look like himself, you need all the body parts working together. In God's church, God desires a concerted effort to include each person and that we move harmoniously, that we are all on the same page, the same mission, working toward the same goal - to bring one more person into the body, one more person who will enjoy eternity in heaven. That's why we strive for harmony; that's why each group and each person joins us in our mission to reach out with Christ's love, care, and hope. When the body moves in harmony, great things happen, the very things God intended His church to accomplish.

6. We operate with a caring heart. In Mr. Potato Head, there's one very important piece that the designers forgot to include as I recall the game. Mr. Potato Head didn't have a heart. Unlike that game, we, as people of God moving in harmony, function with a caring heart. We notice; we do what we can to relieve, and we walk with others through their pain. There are wonderful examples of caring hearts in this congregation, but there is also room for more caring hearts. Caring hearts touch lives and as they touch lives, others see what the love of Christ looks like and as they see that love in action, they see a place where they want to belong.

7. Mr. Potato Head may create some useful imagery. Yet, more important than imagery is what we do with what we know. As you leave this place today, I leave you with this question, "What are you going to do next to be that portrait in motion?"