

**“God’s Mosaic –Fitting the Pieces Together”**  
**Micah 6:6-8 & 1 Corinthians 12:4-27**

Sermon by Jan Edmiston  
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Note: In this last sermon in the series on *Living Creatively*, the NT lesson comes from Paul’s letter to the Church at Corinth in Greece. He wrote this letter from Ephesus to a people we can remember if we recall what Corinthian columns look like on a building. They are the fancy ones, and the Corinthians fancied themselves as the cultural leaders of the world.

My husband Fred and I were looking for a coffee table for our living room a couple of years ago. And I’m not normally one of those world travelers who goes for the shopping, returning home with trunks full of treasures. But when I went to Jordan in the Middle East two years ago, I came home with a mosaic coffee table. (One of my clergy colleagues on the trip offered free marriage counseling if Fred didn’t like didn’t like the table, but I’m married to a very patient man.)

I liked the table – not only because it was beautifully crafted and unique, but also because it symbolized a time and place where Christians had a clear sense of what was most important in their lives: worship (even when it was dangerous to worship), praise (for God’s creativity), and work (crafting something that brought glory to God.)

The table came from Madaba, Jordan – a place where Moses had actually walked on his way to the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> And – if you remember this story from the Bible – Moses never reached the Promised Land.<sup>2</sup>

He got as far as Madaba and then he climbed Mt. Nebo. And as he stood up on that mountain, God told him that that was as far as he would be able to go with the children of Israel. He would die on that mountain and be buried someplace nearby. Nobody knows exactly where.

The name Moses and the word mosaic are clearly connected. Mosaic law – the law that Moses passed down from God – is a list of commandments that – as a group – make a whole portrait of the way we are supposed to live. And mosaic art, of course, involves pictures made from tiny bits of tile and glass and stones pieced together to create a whole and beautiful image.

Now jump ahead in history about 1200 years to the time of Jesus. After Jesus was crucified in the first century, those who believed in him were in such danger, that many of them left Jerusalem either immediately – and others left a generation later<sup>3</sup> – and they headed for the other side of the Jordan River. They settled in villages that are still predominantly Christian to this very day. One of those villages is still called Madaba, at the foot of Mt. Nebo.

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<sup>1</sup> Madaba or Medeba is mentioned in Joshua 13:9.

<sup>2</sup> See Deuteronomy 34.

<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 AD.

Madaba became a center for mosaic craftsmanship and just steps away, on top of Mt. Nebo, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Christians built a church where they believed Moses died, with a gorgeous mosaic floor. In 1933, archaeologists found it: a meticulously crafted design of God's creation – people and animals and trees, all surrounded by a grapevine border. That's the mosaic on our coffee table, and it's amazing to look at all the tiny pieces and consider how much work went into making a whole, complete picture. Like the pieces of Mosaic law everything came together to make a whole, clear design.

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The prophet Micah – who came at least 500 years after Moses – summed up the law this way: What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. As we travel along, sorting out the pieces of our lives, this is the punch line for the question: How are we supposed to live?

***Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God.***

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The Corinthians had a hard time being humble. They considered themselves to be among the most learned and sophisticated people in the ancient world. By virtue of simply being Greek, they believed they were full of great wisdom and knowledge.

If you saw the movie *My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding* you might remember the father of the bride who constantly explained to anyone who would listen that Greeks created civilization as we know it.

“There are two kinds of people,” he said, “Greeks, and everyone else who wish they were Greek.”

And in another scene, the daughter Toula, was dressed up and heading out off for a secret date with her non-Greek boyfriend when her father said, “Where are you going?” Toula lied saying, “I'm taking a pottery class.” To which her father responds: “Ah! You know, the Greeks invented pottery.”

This is how the First Century Corinthians thought of themselves too. They considered themselves the inventors of all culture.

And so when Paul received word from several friends in Corinth that there was dissention in the Corinthian Church<sup>4</sup>, Paul knew he needed to handle it with a deft touch – not offending the sensibilities of these people, but teaching them what it really meant to follow Jesus.

It was like a human body.

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<sup>4</sup> Apollos (Acts 19:1); The household of Chloe, and from Stephanas and friends (1 Corinthians 1:11, 16-17).

In Paul's day, they didn't yet know that the human brain was the center of thought and passion, of course. They didn't know anything about DNA or the circulatory system. But they knew that the human body was a whole made up of various pieces: arms, legs, hands, feet, eyes and ears. And the different parts were utterly dependent upon each other.

The foot and the hand are both important but they have different functions. The eye and the ear and the nose are all necessary and apart from each other, the body doesn't work as well.

God put the body together like a beautiful piece of art, a glorious machine. Paul writes that God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose. The human body is God's amazing creation, each one crafted by God and unique.

Paul writes in his letter to them that there are many important spiritual gifts. And notice how he starts this list. At the top of the list are the ones the Greeks value the most: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge. Healing was valued, but not nearly as much as speaking with erudition and intelligence. And at the bottom of the list would be speaking in tongues and then interpreting speaking in tongues.

Speaking in tongues was a rare gift in which someone was overcome with spiritual fervor to the point of speaking in a holy language to God. It's something most mainline Christians have never witnessed and don't really care to witness. In many circles, speaking in tongues is considered showy and unsophisticated, something that snake handlers do.

(My sister once spent months trying to convince a college boyfriend to come to church with her. And when he finally did, the person sitting at the other side of him during worship started "speaking in tongues." It scared him so much that he never went out with her again.) We mainline, traditional Protestants tend to be afraid of it too.

The problem with speaking in tongues is that if you are blessed with this gift, it only benefits you unless there is also someone to interpret to the rest of the congregation so that they will get something out of it.<sup>5</sup>

The Greeks did not understand speaking in tongues either. And so they didn't value it very much. Notice that Paul puts these gifts – speaking in tongues and interpreting – at the bottom of the list. The Corinthians would have found comfort in this.

We are a bit like the Corinthians – don't you think? We tend to value the preacher more than the Sunday School teacher and the elder more than the person who re-paints the closet in the basement. My husband Fred was slated to speak at a church years ago, and went to the auditorium early dressed in a t-shirt and jeans to be sure the chairs and tables were arranged correctly. When he saw that nothing had been set up yet,

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<sup>5</sup> In Acts 19:6, some new Christians in Ephesus spoke in tongues.

he and the janitor pulled out the tables and chairs and set up the room together. As they were finishing, some of the clergy coming to the meeting early came in and were greeted by Fred, but he looked like one of the janitors and therefore could be ignored. They barely acknowledged him.

He went home, took a shower, changed his clothes and returned dressed like the keynote speaker (which he was). And the VIPs all clamored to shake his hand and introduce themselves. Suddenly he was valuable to them.

Unfortunately, too many of us do this. But Paul says that the indispensable ones are actually the body parts we tend to value the least. The elbows. The lower backs. The necks.

Which part are you?

And here's an even more important question? Who do you think is the *head* of this Body? The answer, of course, is Jesus. It's not me. It's not the person who has his or her hand in everything. It's Jesus. We are merely the parts.

Maybe we pride ourselves in running the church. Or maybe we don't see that we have any part at all. Maybe we aren't sure we even fit in anywhere.

But the truth is this: that we need all the parts from the little toe to the left shoulder.

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In closing, the analogy eventually breaks down. The human body gets old. Muscles atrophy and hair falls out and eyes become dim and hearing becomes weaker. If we live long enough, we just wear out.

There are many weak and worn out churches in the world, but God has promised that there will always be a Church. It might not be this kind of church, this kind of Body. Our denomination is torn almost in two over several controversial issues. There was a time when this congregation was torn in two. Human bodies die and some congregations die.

But every once in a while, someone digs deep and discovers the ancient foundation of what the church is supposed to be according to Scripture. And when we dig, we often find something awesome and inspiring like an ancient mosaic floor. And we realize again our true calling.

As we take a look at the future of this church, consider what part you are called to be. Remember that whatever we do is meant to serve the common good. And if you are uncertain what that looks like, remember Micah:

**O Mortal, what is good and what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with God.**

***Let us pray:***

*God, in Christ you give us our foundation and our head. Help us to discern our place in the grand mosaic of your great plan. And bring us together as one, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*