

**The Weakest Link**  
*January 21, 2007*  
(Epiphany 3 - Year C)  
1 Corinthians 12: 12-27  
*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Several years ago, game shows made a comeback on prime time television.

One of those prime time TV game shows was brought over from across the Atlantic, from the UK.

This game show was called: The Weakest Link.

In this show, eight contestants answered questions.

Then, after each round, the contestants voted out someone who they thought was the weakest link.

The best part of the show, however, was the host of the game show.

The host was a British woman named Anne Robinson.

She was condescending and playfully rude with the contestants.

And, when the votes were tallied after each round,

In her clipped British accent, she would announce the name of the contestant voted off, by saying:

“Jeff, you are the weakest link. Goodbye.”

In today's reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, Paul is writing to his beloved Corinthians and telling them what the Church, also known as the Body of Christ, looks like.

However, it seems as if those Corinthians had been playing the game “The Weakest Link” and identifying the weakest or least intelligent or the poorest people in the Christian community and labeling them as inferior members.

In response to this problem in Corinth, Paul compares the Christian community, the Church, to a human body, a human body with hands and eyes and feet.

Paul says that all of these parts of the body are important to the functioning of the whole body, as he writes:

“The eye cannot say to the hand,  
‘I have no need of you.’”

Or, in the language of that infamous British TV game show.  
The eye cannot say to the hand:  
“You are the weakest link. Goodbye.”

When Susan and I first met each other, we were in a Young Singles  
Bible Study at our church.  
In this Bible study was a man named Mike.  
Now, Mike was mentally disabled.

Sometimes, Mike didn't understand the discussion.  
He didn't seem to understand the teaching of the history of the Bible or  
of the Greek words or of the doctrines that were revealed.  
Sometimes, Mike would take the discussion in the Bible study off on an  
embarrassing tangent.  
Sometimes, I wondered why Mike even came to the Bible study since he  
didn't seem to understand what was going on.  
To me, Mike was the weakest link in our group.

One night at Bible study, we were studying a very difficult passage of  
Scripture, and the leader asked us to go around the circle and to  
each give our own interpretation of the passage.  
After each of us gave our lengthy opinions on this biblical text, we got  
around to Mike and waited for his answer.  
Mike replied:  
“Well, I think that this passage means that we are supposed to love God  
and to love everybody.”

The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians:  
“There are many members, yet one body.  
The eye cannot say to the hand,  
‘I have no need of you,’  
Nor again the head to the feet,  
‘I have no need of you.’”

Now, it might seem that Paul is saying that we should treat everyone in the body equally.

But, if we read on further in the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul does not say that we should treat everyone equally.

Paul says that those parts of the body that *we think* are inferior, we should treat with *greater* honor and respect.

Paul is not only writing about hands and eyes and feet.

Paul is also writing about those *inferior* parts of the body.

Paul is writing about those weakest links of the body:

The crooked toes, the pointy noses, the paunchy stomachs.

And, all of these parts, all of these people who we think are inferior, who we think are the weakest link,

Paul says that we should *not* treat them equally, but we should treat them with *greater* honor and respect.

Now, I would like to say a word about that Old Testament reading that we heard this morning.

First, I think that we all need to give Garry/Stewart a round of applause for tackling the pronunciation of all of those Hebrew names from the Book of Nehemiah.

Now, you all know that our scripture readings come from the 3 year cycle of Bible readings that we call the Lectionary.

However, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church last summer approved the use of a *new* lectionary, that we will use at St. Alban's beginning this Advent, in December of this year.

This new lectionary is called the Revised Common Lectionary and it is already being used by our Methodist and Lutheran and other Protestant brothers and sisters.

Anyway, the good news for Garry/Stewart, and for other lectors in the future, is that in the new Revised Common Lectionary,

The reading from Nehemiah that we heard today will *omit* those verses that contain all those funky Hebrew names.

So, in three years, in 2010, when this scripture reading comes up again,

we won't hear about Anaiah and Pediah and Hilkiah and.... all those other guys.

But, I don't think that the omission of those names is necessarily a good thing.

I am sure that, back in the day, those guys with weird names were to be treated with honor and respect as much as anyone with an easy to pronounce name.

And, I wonder if we now see these men as the weakest link in our lectionary, just because we don't know how to say their names.

I wonder if our new lectionary is unfairly saying to these ancient Hebrew men:

You are the weakest link. Goodbye.

I am sure that all of us have worked with people whom we wished their names could be omitted by a new lectionary.

Of course, I don't *currently* work with anyone like that, because the staff at St. Alban's is a perfect joy to work with.

But, in my prior career, I can remember people whom I worked with who I wish could have been omitted from the list of the senior management team.

I can remember dreading those senior management team meetings, because I thought that the Vice President of Marketing was a real jerk.

I didn't agree with his marketing strategy, I didn't like his ideas, and I didn't think he deserved honor or respect.

And, as I sat through those interminable meetings with him and the rest of the management team, I kept wondering:

How long will it take for someone to say this jerk?:

You are the weakest link. Goodbye.

But, the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians,

The Apostle Paul says to all of us:

“On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

And those members of the body that *we think* less honorable we [should]

clothe with *greater* honor,  
And our less respectable members are [to be] treated with *greater*  
respect...that there may be no dissension in the body.”

We cannot say to anyone:  
“I have no need of you.”

On the contrary, those weak links whom we encounter in our  
workplaces, in our churches, in our homes, in our schools, should  
be given *greater* honor and respect.

And, why is it so important that we treat the inferior members, the  
weakest links, with honor and respect?  
Because, the weakest link might... be you.

AMEN.

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