Everybody is Greater Than Somebody Nov. 1. 2020
Series: *The "We" Factor* Acts 6:1-7, etc.

Today we continue in our series *The "We" Factor.*

We've been talking about the vital subject of biblical community. Faith is often considered to be a personal and private matter in today's culture, but authentic biblical faith is not a "me" thing, it's a "we" thing. It's all about relationships.

And the God who exists in an interdependent, loving community of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— has created you and me in his relational image. So we're made for loving relationships with God and with each other. We're created for community.

And when community was shattered by sin, God the Father sent God the Son into the world in the power of God the Spirit. Jesus came to lay down his life for us so that our relationships with God and each other could be reconciled. So that the many—who had been divided into factions because of sin's strife— could be united into one loving family in Christ.

That's why the Bible urges us in Ephesians to "make every effort" to pursue loving unity in the church— unity that bridges every divide— racial, cultural, gender, generational, social, personal. That's what our favourite Kiwi preacher, Peter, talked about last Sunday.

I'd like to begin today's message with a story of a short-lived technological innovation from an era of ancient history—an era known as the 1990s.

Have you ever heard of Microsoft Encarta? If you have, and you're watching live, type Y for yes in the chat.

(In doing so, you'll be letting everyone know that you're of a certain age!)

Microsoft Encarta was an entire encyclopedia set on a single CD-ROM. Now, some of you, who aren't of a certain age are probably wondering, "What's a CD-ROM?" If you don't know, just Google it.

In the early 1990's, Microsoft hired a small army of writers, supervisors and professors to develop Encarta. People with graduate degrees carefully researched, compiled, and edited the information, and then Microsoft put it into an easy-to-access electronic format.

No longer would you need to wrestle with all those bulky volumes. Encarta would very quickly displace the legendary Encyclopedia Britannica as the #1 encyclopedia in the world. The encyclopedia game had gone digital.

But just a few years later, the nature of the digital game changed. With the rise of the Internet, Encarta would be rapidly eclipsed by another encyclopedia—which to this day

remains the most popular encyclopedia the world has ever known, by far. Who will be the first person to write what it is in the chat? Which encyclopedia am I talking about?

Wikipedia, of course.

And here's the thing about Wikipedia. They didn't hire professors and editors to write the content. They didn't assemble a specialized staff to make sure all the information was correct. Because who writes and edits the articles for Wikipedia? That's right, we do. Wikipedia is open-source— it's written collaboratively by those who use it. It's written by *everybody*.

The story of Wikipedia's rise over Encarta illustrates the central lesson we're going to be drawing today from various passages of the Bible: **Everybody is greater than somebody.**

With that central lesson in mind, let's turn to the book of Acts, chapter 6. Please follow along as I read verses 1-7:

> But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.
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> So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."
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> Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.
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> So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.[1]

Let's begin to unpack this text a bit. The church in Jerusalem was growing fast. Verse 1 tells us that "the believers rapidly multiplied." And immediately, the text goes on to say that, "there were rumblings of discontent" in the church.

So the first thing we can note here is that growth and change in the church can often lead to challenges.

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[1] Acts 6:1-7 (NLT)

Nevertheless, we still want the church to grow, right? Because what's the alternative to growth? Stagnation. Decline.

If you've been at Cornerstone for any length of time, you're well aware that this church has been growing fast over the last several years. We praise God for that, and we haven't even been aware of any rumblings of discontent, thank the Lord.

Of course, the year 2020 has been about nothing if not about change. The pandemic has caused us to dramatically shift our ministries across the board, and managing all of this change has at times been disorienting, unsettling and draining for many of us.

Still, a surprising number of newcomers continue to join this church, in spite of the fact that many of them have only ever experienced Cornerstone online. While we won't know for sure until we're on the other side of the pandemic, it would seem like Cornerstone continues to grow even now, which is a hopeful sign.

But as Dorothy once said—not Cornerstone's Dorothy, but Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz— "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." The world now is dramatically different than it was when 2020 began. And in the face of both growth and change, we shouldn't be surprised when challenges arise for us here at Cornerstone.

The challenges that stemmed from growth and change in the Jerusalem church had to do with the treatment of widows, combined with some cultural tensions. Normally, widows would be taken care of by their own relatives. But in those days, when someone became a Christian, their families would often cut ties with them. So in the case of many Christian widows, the only family they had left to look after their needs was their spiritual family, the church.

Just two chapters prior in the book of Acts, it says that "all the believers were united in heart and mind" and "there were no needy persons among them." [2] But now, just two chapters later, we see challenges in both areas. There was discontent among the Greek-speaking believers because their widows were being overlooked and were in real need.

Why did these challenges so suddenly arise? Growth and change! That's why. The church had grown by many thousands of people in a very short period of time, which meant there were more and more widows that needed care. The church grew so fast there was no time to even anticipate much less set up an equitable feeding program, especially when you throw cultural and language barriers into the mix. The scale and complexity of the whole thing was way more than the apostles could administer themselves. They needed help.

So in verse 2, the apostles call all the believers together for a big meeting. They lay out the challenges in a clear and direct manner, along with a proposed solution. They said:

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[2] See Acts 4:32, 34.

> "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word." Everyone liked this idea…[3]

And so the apostles pray over these seven wise, Spirit-filled individuals—several of them belonging to the Greek-speaking minority— and they commission them to the task of overseeing the feeding program. In this we see, among other things, that the challenges stemming from growth and change get solved as people in the church step up to serve.

As these seven people step up to serve, it frees the apostles to focus on their primary calling of praying and teaching God's word. And in verse 7, we see the result of all of this:

> So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem…[4]

That's what it's all about, isn't it? Whenever we step up to serve in the church—whether in-person or online— do you know what we're doing? We're making it possible for good news of Jesus Christ to continue to spread! That's what we're doing! That's why we serve!

In Acts 6, we've seen that church growth and change come with challenges. We've also seen that those challenges get solved as people step up to serve, and as a result, the church reaches even more people for Jesus—the church's mission is fulfilled.

In Acts 6 we also see the apostles—the main leaders of the church— empowering others to lead and to serve. I love what they say in verse 3:

> We will give them this responsibility.[5]

So the apostles aren't possessive or insecure. They don't hog all the ministry responsibility, keeping it to themselves. They give it away! This connects with another New Testament principle: **Ministry is for everybody**—it's for every follower of Jesus.

This principle is another example of the "we factor." Christian ministry isn't a "me" thing. It's a "we" thing, an "us" thing. Ministry is for everybody, and everybody is greater than somebody.

Now "ministry" is a common term for serving God, but when many people hear it, what do they think of? They think of a pastor, or a priest. A professional clergy person, many say, is a *minister*. As a result, many church folks have a concept of ministry that's modelled more on Superman that on Jesus:

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[3] Acts 6:2-5 (NLT)
[4] Acts 6:7a (NLT)
[5] Acts 6:3b (NLT)

> Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to fill the baptismal tank with a single bucket, it's Super Pastor! Super Pastor teaches the most insightful Bible classes; Super Pastor preaches the highest quality sermons without fail; Super Pastor has wise counsel for your every need, sings inspirational solos, visits your great aunt Matilda in the hospital, and somehow manages to raise all the funds the church needs, and then some.

I thank God Cornerstone has never expected us to be Super Pastors! You may see Pastor Jeremy wearing Superman attire now and then, but I assure you that's only because he happens to be a Superman fan. It's not because he wants you to let him carry the church's entire ministry load on his shoulders, broad as those shoulders may be.

Contrast the Super Pastor mentality with what the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 4:

> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. [6]

When we serve together, we grow together. When we serve together, we mature spiritually. When we serve together, we become more like Jesus.

Therefore, this passage teaches that the job of church leaders like pastors and church staff to do all the ministry ourselves? No! It teaches that the job of pastors and other church leaders is to *equip* and *empower* God's people—that's all of you guys—to serve, to do the work of ministry.

God says that every member of his family is a minister in some way, shape, or form. In God's family, ministry is for everybody. And it's at that point—when every follower of Jesus gets off the bench and into the game of serving—that the church get built up, as the passage says, and its impact expands exponentially—just like we saw in Acts 6 when the gospel message continued to spread and the number of believers increased greatly.

Remember, everybody is greater than somebody. That was true of the church of Jesus Christ two millennia before Wikipedia came into existence. When it comes to serving in the church, the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. Kingdom gains are exponentially greater when the power of everybody gets harnessed. That's the power of the *"We" Factor*.

In order for God to continue the wonderful work he's been doing here at Cornerstone, each of us must continue to live into the fact that ministry is for everybody. Each of us has a part

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[6] Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

to play— including you— whether you've been part of this church for 20 years or two months.

That's because **every person's service is vitally important**. As Pastor Rick Warren says:

> There are no insignificant ministries in the church. Some are visible, and some are behind the scenes, but all are valuable.[7]

In church life, it may be tempting to think that the really significant ministries are the ones that are the most up-front, the most visible. But imagine what would happen to the church if the behind-the scenes people didn't do their thing? The whole church would shut down in a big hurry, just like your body would shut down if its internal, unseen parts didn't do their thing.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul likens the church to a human body. Every part has its function, and every part is vitally important:

> Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary… All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. [8]

So in the church, every person's service, every person's contribution—including yours— is vitally important.

Now at this point, some of you might be thinking, "Okay, it does seem pretty clear. If ministry is for everybody in the church, and everybody is greater than somebody— well, I'm part of everybody— so maybe it's time for me to step up and serve at Cornerstone. But how do I go about it—during a pandemic of all times?" Great question. Let's talk about that.

On Sunday, November 29th, we will be having an **online Ministry Fair** at Cornerstone. We're still working out the particulars, but you'll have the chance to explore areas where we need people to serve at Cornerstone. You'll be able to ask questions and speak with staff about opportunities to serve in a variety of areas, both online and in-person. Because when

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[7] As quoted in: https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/276861-transform-congregation-serving-passionately.html

[8] 1 Corinthians 12:14-22, 27 (NLT)

we are able to gather in-person for worship again, there will a number of new areas where we'll need extra help.

Whether you serve in an online or in-person capacity or both, you'll be able to get information about any ministry area you might be interested in at the Ministry Fair, including the time commitments involved.

So if you're ready to step up and serve at Cornerstone, make sure to participate in the Ministry Fair on November 29th. Prayerfully find a role that seems like a good fit for you, and just jump in and start serving.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, our kingdom impact will multiply exponentially when all God's people serve. Because everybody is greater than somebody.

With that, it is time for us to celebrate **the Lord's Supper** together. If you're watching live, I trust you have your communion elements ready so you can participate at home.

As I said earlier, we have been created, and we are being redeemed, in the image of the relational God. We are made for loving relationships with God and with each other.

The Lord's Supper, or communion, is a celebration of just that—of the fellowship we share with God and with each other. Both dimensions of communion—relationship with God and with each other—are made possible by Jesus Christ—what he has done for us on the cross, where his body was broken for us, his blood shed for us.

We have a relationship God only through Christ, and our relationships with each other are made possible in Christ, and sustained by Christ.

Nowhere is this truth more powerfully expressed that in the Lord's Supper. Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 10:

> When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body.[9]

Although COVID separates us, we remain united as one body in Christ. Although we are eating and drinking in our homes today, we are nonetheless doing so together, at the same time, united in spirit as one family in Christ. Therefore, as we partake today, we are still sharing together in the blood and body of Christ, in spite of the fact that we're not physically together.

As we heard last Sunday, because we are one in Christ, Paul urges us to make every effort to live into that oneness, and to do all we can to maintain unity in the church. Would you eat and drink prayerfully today, and see what Jesus would have you do to contribute to the

[9] 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (NLT)

loving unity of this church family? Is it by serving? Is it by giving? Is it by praying for the church and its ministries? Is it by setting a strained relationship right?

Because on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and broke it…