



CHURCH IN  
**Bethesda**

“DEPENDENT ORIGINATION”

RYAN PHIPPS, SENIOR MINISTER, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2017

I’m just going to start by going out on a limb today and asking a question which I think I already know the answer to, but I’ll ask it anyway.

How many of you are familiar with something called, “The Law Of Dependent Origination?”

Raise your hand if you are.

No one. That’s what I figured, so let me explain.

The Law Of Dependent Origination is the idea that all things exist because of other things. It’s the idea that all things are, in some way connected. Flourishing and/or failure are not things that happen in a vacuum, but always involve one’s connection to other things.

The Economist, Milton Friedman (who passed away in 2006) was (and still is) a controversial figure when it comes to economic theory. Friedman made a lot of

sense on a lot of things, and then other things that he said would leave me scratching my head because they were so idealistic.

Anyway, among the many illustrations he used to craft his theory about markets, he was probably most well known for his illustration called, “The Pencil.” And I think it does a really good job of explaining this idea of Dependent Origination.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH \(18MB\)](#)

Let’s watch Friedman in his own words. That makes a lot of sense, doesn’t it?

We don’t think about all of the people involved in the manufacturing of something so small and simple like a pencil, but it involves a partnership between thousands of people.

The Law of Dependent Origination— no matter how big or how small, the flourishing and/or failure of all things always involve others.

## THE BODY OF CHRIST

Our passage for today says this. And as you listen, tell me if this sounds at all similar.

### 1 Corinthians 12

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by[c] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?

20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

We see that God’s idea of the thing that we call, “church” is far different from what we may have been programmed to believe it is, whether by teaching or cultural osmosis.

It's easy to get it mixed up. I grew up in a home where we "went to church" on Sunday. Where we'd "drive past the church" during the week. The Church was a destination, a place, a building, a thing that we would participate in, then go back to our lives for the rest of the week.

And yet, the scriptures teach us something wholly other.

The church is not something that we do.

The church is not a place where we go.

The church is something that we are.

The same writer of Corinthians would write this in another of his letters,

And God placed all things under the feet of Christ and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- Ephesians 1:23

But wait a minute. I thought God was (for lack of better terminology) something more like an omnipresent ghost that just kind of hung in the air around us and got involved when we paid attention to it?

Nope.

That's not what scripture teaches.

Scripture teaches us that God fills everything in every way through a specific medium — the church.

What if that's true?

What if we stopped looking for God in all the wrong places? An invisible phantom that we pray prayers and sing songs to, and then wait for weeks, months, or years for something to happen that never does?

What if, instead we looked for God in those standing right next to us?

What if that's where God is?

What if that's church?

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

“...the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

I love the greeting that they give in UU churches. They begin their own greeting of peace each week, by saying to one

another “The God in me greets the God in you.”

What if we started thinking and believing that way so fervently, that it snapped us out of illusion into reality?

What if we really started to believe that when we come to this place to gather as people of faith, as varied and diverse as we all are, that we each brought a piece of the Divine with us?

What if we started looking at our neighbors, our friends, and our community, not as distractions in our attempts to have experiences with God, but as necessities? What if God can only be found for ourselves if we look for God in others?

It takes more than one person to make a pencil.

It also takes more than one person to make a church.

The church is not a location, a building, or an appointment on our calendars. It is a living, breathing, struggling, growing collective of diverse people working together toward the common goal of a more just and peaceful world.

And when we work together, God is there.

It's why Jesus said,

“For where two or more gather in my name, I am there among them.”

-Matthew 18:20

Is the antithesis true then?

If we try to do this all on our own, and find God all alone, will we ever find God?

We cannot get close to God by getting further away from one another.

This is the truth about this collective that we call “the church.”

We need one another. We cannot make it without one another.

We

“...should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

And that is why we come to this place. To struggle together. To endure together. To rejoice together. To celebrate one another.

This is the key that unlocks the Kingdom of God for ourselves and for the world.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you (what?) love one another.”

-John 13:35

We need not listen to sermons to find it. We need not hold up signs to display it. We need not sing songs to feel it. All of the things that we do when we gather are to remind us of the importance of togetherness- that we cannot do this without the person sitting next to us.

## CLOSING

Sir Michael Costa was one of the great orchestral conductors of the 19th Century.

There's an old story about him that I love, where he was conducting a rehearsal with his Orchestra while being joined by a giant choir.

There were so many musical things happening at the same time during the rehearsal that it was creating a giant cacophony where nothing was distinguishable.

So midway through the rehearsal Costa's piccolo player just stopped playing. And why wouldn't she? After all, who would miss the sound of a tiny

piccolo amidst the great mass of instruments and voices?

And not seconds later, Costa slammed his baton on the music stand in front of him and yelled, “Stop! Stop! Where’s the piccolo? What happened to the piccolo?”

Costa knew that every part of his orchestra mattered, no matter how small and insignificant the player may have thought they were, Costa knew that their specific contribution to the piece was vital, and without them the song would be incomplete.

And this is exactly how it is with the church. Every piece playing their part of the song is what makes it beautiful.

Whatever part of the body you consider yourself, don’t stop playing. The song is incomplete without you. The story doesn’t make sense without your contribution to it.

I had the most beautiful meeting with someone in our church this week who said that she wanted to become a member of our church, but that she was currently unemployed and had nothing to give financially, but that she did have time to give and wanted to be involved in any way that she could so that our community

could flourish. And you know what? She got it. She gets it.

There's another gentlemen in our church who is doing really well in his career, but he's working so many hours that he has very little time contribute to the church, but he is uniquely gifted in a place and in his life where he can help the church financially.

And this is how its supposed to work.

The woman who has time to give but not money. The man who has money to give but no time. These things (strangely enough) complete one another.

This is God's way and it is beautiful.

We each have something that we lack. We each have something that we have in abundance. Inequality only arises when we don't work together combining our strengths and weaknesses.

What are your strengths?

What are your weaknesses?

What do you have in abundance?

What do you lack?

Things are that way for a reason. SO we would learn to depend on one another, and when we do, we begin to live in the reality of this thing that we call The Body Of Christ — the church, where no one is left out, and no one is left behind.

Let's pray.