I have no need of you

我不需要你

1Cor. 12: 12-31 1/26/2025

Grace Rohrer

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us that every member of the church is like an eye, ear, or hand. The foot cannot say to the hand, "I don’t need you," and the eye cannot claim to the other parts, "I am the body." Paul emphasizes that the weaker members of the body are crucial to the health and well-being of the whole body. So, what exactly does Paul mean by this?

The novel *Watership Down* by British author Richard Adams tells the story of a group of rabbits searching for a safe warren. Along the way, they encounter numerous challenges. The novel is notable for portraying different political systems in each rabbit society the group encounters. The warren at the beginning of the story features a traditional, hierarchical society, which the rabbits flee from because they foresee that humans are about to destroy it. They next come across a warren ruled by a military dictator, where all the rabbits live in fear. The third seems to symbolize a decadent modern society: the rabbits there live relatively comfortably but have lost their ability to fend for themselves. More seriously, they fail to realize that they are under the control of a farmer, who both feeds them and systematically kills them. Ultimately, the rabbits find their own warren, their new home —Watership Down.

In their journey and adventures, the rabbits learn many lessons, but perhaps the most important is that they are all indispensable to one another. One is large and strong, another is clever and imaginative, a third is incredibly fast, a fourth is deeply loyal, and a fifth is a master storyteller. Perhaps the most crucial rabbit is the smallest and clumsiest one. Despite its lack of physical strength, it possesses a sixth sense—an instinct for danger, such as sensing when their original warren is about to be destroyed. What makes this group of rabbits so special is their bond, their ability to recognize and make use of each member’s strengths and talents, ensuring they never lack in wisdom or courage when facing challenges. In other words, this group of rabbits lives, acts, and thinks as one body, rather than as a collection of separate individuals.

Being part of a group like the rabbits would indeed be a wonderful experience. A team can only succeed when its members combine qualities such as efficiency, size, strength, perseverance, courage, and imagination. When the members of a team acknowledge that no one is the star, but rather that everyone is needed, that’s when true success happens. Similarly, actors in a play, musicians in an orchestra, and singers in a choir all share this understanding. A soprano wouldn’t say to an alto in *Messiah*, "I don’t need you." Each person’s contribution is essential to the overall performance, and it’s through this mutual recognition of need that a team thrives.

Therefore, becoming one ‘body’ is a familiar experience in human life. However, I believe these rabbits provide us with several important lessons about what it means to be the Church. I would like to highlight three such lessons.

First, we can never say we've "made it." The rabbits in the story are like Christians pressing forward in life, longing to reach a point where they can say, "Ah, finally, it's done." However, such a moment will never come. Teenagers long to leave home, students yearn to earn their degree financial independence, parents look forward to the birth of their first child, people hope to pay off their loans, and those nearing the end of their careers wish for a healthy and peaceful retirement.

The same is true for the Church. We long to raise funds for a new building, launch outreach programs, find a qualified pastor, or resolve issues in the music ministry. But that moment will never fully arrive. The story of the rabbits shows us why such a moment should never come. When the rabbits encounter those living an easy, carefree life, they discover that those lost in indulgence have lost the essential qualities needed for being a community. They have lost the ability to speak the truth and, ultimately, lost the ability to survive.

The Church is always a "pilgrimage companion." Whenever you encounter a group of Christians who think they've "made it"—whether in terms of numbers, doctrine, or purity —it’s easy to foresee that they will soon face difficulties. Israel was formed on the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, and the disciples were formed on their journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The Church gradually becomes a body on its shared journey. It is always a work in progress.

Seeing ourselves as pilgrim companions should help us avoid the twin temptations of becoming too immersed in the culture around us or completely isolating ourselves from it. We cannot treat this culture as our permanent home. However, the reality is that we have a higher commitment to fulfill, and this does not mean that the culture itself is inherently bad. On the contrary, the gifts along our journey often come not just from one another, but from strangers. In the story, the rabbits receive crucial help from a bird who can see what they cannot, and from a little girl on a farm who saves one of them from the claws of a cat. Similarly, the pilgrim Church should be open to receiving remarkable gifts from those it might consider strangers, or even enemies.

Second, the diversity of the Church is a strength, not a weakness. The rabbits were able to survive because they had different gifts, different strengths, and different directions to move in. Paul says we have different kinds of gifts, from the same Spirit; different ways of serving, but the same Lord. While Paul may have seen it this way, this is not the mainstream view among Christians today. Today, we often say to one another, "If your language is different, you should go to a different church; if your ideology differs, you should go to a different church; if you like different music, you should go to a different church; if you understand liturgy, Scripture, baptism, or even the gifts of the Spirit differently, you should go to a different church."

The Bible consists of 66 books, each different—some quite distinct from one another—and one or two even seem to contradict each other. Yet, nearly all Christians regard the entire Bible as a gift from God to the Church, revealing God's character and showing His purposes. If we naturally believe that these 66 books collectively reveal God, why then should we not also believe that the thousands of denominations can serve as places where God is revealed? If we cannot afford to lose any one of these books and still understand everything about God, why do we think we cannot fully know God without understanding the various ways other Christians live out their faith? We need one another. We need each other to know God. We cannot say to one another, "I don’t need you."

The third lesson, learned from the rabbits in *Watership Down*, is that being a body is not simply about tolerating differences and dissent. In the story, what saves the rabbits in critical moments is their willingness to listen to one another, to hear each other’s stories, concerns, doubts, and hopes. It is these wonderful memories and visions that give rise to the resilience and adaptability of the group.

So, being part of the Church, becoming a body, means taking the time to listen to each other’s stories: hearing why certain peoples feel the need to split, listening to how another group has been forced to withdraw, understanding why some consider certain ideas core to their beliefs while others give hardly a passing thought, and why so many who believe in unity and truth can be separated, thinking they can go on without the other.

Being a body doesn't just mean the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." It also means that if the eye is in pain, the whole body feels that pain, and the hand will strain to ease that suffering. Paul’s analogy isn’t about mere tolerance; it’s about shared direction, shared wisdom, and shared suffering. Being a body may be more frustrating than walking separate paths. We spend so much time on what we deem important— personal beliefs that make us feel so important that listening to each other’s stories is a waste of time. But Paul says to us, "Your mission is to be a body. Your message is that Christ has made you one. There’s nothing more worthwhile than this to rush toward."

So, these are the three lessons from 1 Corinthians 12, through the lens of the rabbits in *Watership Down*. First, we can never say we’ve "made it." All church life is transitional. We are pilgrim companions. Second, differences are gifts and strengths, not weaknesses. Third, unity requires effort, and this effort is not a distraction but at the heart of the Gospel.

What we’re discussing is not just any ordinary body, but the body of Christ. The Eucharist calls us to examine ourselves and understand the significance of being Christ’s body. The body and blood of the Lord connect us not only to Him but also to one another as brothers and sisters. We cannot share in the Lord’s bread and cup and then say to another Christian, "I don’t need you." In reality, that is like saying to Jesus, "I don’t need You."

Among all Christians around the world, perhaps we at ATPC need to hear these words more than anyone. We haven’t "arrived" yet. Despite having many rituals and resources, ATPC is still a transitional institution, dedicated to the unity of the Church. We have no right to say to any Christian, "I don’t need you." ATPC also has no right to look down on other expressions of faith but should strive to regard every Christian tradition as a rich gift from God. We must also work hard to listen to the stories of those whose views differ, who feel excluded, or who feel they have no choice but to leave. ATPC is not an uncompromising body for those unwilling to truly engage with the Church, but rather a calling for all Christians with different perspectives to cross every barrier, gather together, and come before God, until they can say to each other, "I need you."