

Many, Making One  
Genesis 4:9; I Corinthians 12:12-22; 27-31a  
Union Church of Cupertino  
January 25, 2004  
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“The eye cannot say to the ear, ‘I have no need of you!’ If all the body were an eye how shall the body hear?” It seems Paul is saying that Lone Rangers are inappropriate in the Christian Church.”

20 years ago when the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. minister of Riverside Church in New York City preached upon this passage he began by talking about monkeys. The Rev. Coffin had just read the results of a 30 year study of the Japanese monkey, *macaca fuscata*. In 1952 scientists had begun dropping sweet potatoes on the sand on the island of Koshima. They observed that the monkeys liked the taste of the sweet potatoes but not of the sand that stuck to them. The scientists kept dropping the sweet potatoes and continued to observe.

An 18-month-old female whom the researchers named Imo was quick to discover that she could solve the sand problem by washing her sweet potatoes in a stream. She taught this improvement to her mother. She taught this improvement to many of her playmates and they taught their mothers too.

For six years the scientists dropped sweet potatoes and they observed. By 1958 all the young monkeys had learned to wash their sweet potatoes. Most of their parents were washing as well but there were still a significant number of adult monkeys that were eating their sweet potatoes with sand.

Then, in the fall of 1958, there was a sudden, quantum change. It was not recorded how many Koshima monkeys were washing their sweet potatoes but let's say it was 99. One morning the 100<sup>th</sup> monkey began to wash his potatoes and by nightfall every monkey on the island had followed suit. The added energy of that 100<sup>th</sup> monkey had somehow triggered a mass conversion to sweet potatoes without sand.

And that's just part of it. The scientists were working other places as well and they noted that the habit of washing sand from sweet potatoes spontaneously jumped over the ocean. Colonies of monkeys on other islands and a mainland troop at Fakasakiyama simultaneously started to wash their sweet potatoes as well.

*-Lifetide* by Lyall Watson [Bantam Books, 1980]; quoted by Ken Keyes in *The Hundredth Monkey* [Vision Books] and cited by Dr. Coffin in his sermon “The Hundredth Monkey,” October 3, 1982)

I have heard that comparisons are odious and I hope you will not find the comparison offensive, but we are just about 99 people gathered for worship today. Last year the average attendance for 52 Sundays was 109 per Sunday, and, figuring that Easter and Christmas Sunday inflated the every other week average, we are just about 99 – right on the cusp!

Today, after worship, at 11:30, when people have had a chance to get a cup of coffee, there is going to be a membership information session in the office conference room. We're actively recruiting new members. Who knows...? Maybe the next new member will provide the energy that is needed to tip us from what has been to what will be, from pessimism to optimism, from dogged effort to effortless joy. Christians believe things can change for the better, and that improvement comes through community.

We need new members.

But it's not just the Union Church of Cupertino that needs new members. Every church should have a banner out by the sidewalk that reads: "We need new members." It's a generic need.

Sometimes a church gets so good that it wants to patent itself, to take out a copyright, to freeze itself in time. This says ever so subtly to those already present, "Well done good and faithful servant." This says ever so subtly to the stranger, "We have no need of you." That church has a terminal illness. All churches need new members because new members come as strangers, and by accommodating the stranger we prevent ourselves from turning to stone.

Every church I know needs visitors and lots of them. Visitors help a church see itself. The first time I attended worship at Union Church of Cupertino I had some wonderful experiences. After the benediction when I stood up I was greeted by every person within a handshake's distance. That felt wonderful. Then I went to shake the minister's hand and on the other side of the minister was the parking lot. I had heard rumors of a coffee hour but I was in the parking lot and there was my car and I didn't know Calvert Hall from Davies Hall. I got in my car and left.

After a week or two among you I'm sure that experience could be forgotten but I'm going to make a note of it for it's a view that must not be forgotten. Please join us for coffee fellowship. At the door I'll point out Calvert Hall or put your hand in the hand of someone going in that direction. We need visitors. They see things we no longer see but which are very important to our welcome.

Every church needs new members on their boards and committees, conscientious people who will as a matter of their duties ask "How come?" Sometimes the answer will be a profound faith statement but sometimes it will be "I don't know," and as the committee investigates some sweet potatoes might get washed in the water.

We need them: guests, new members, new board and committee members. We must not say "Who has need of you?" for it will be the energy of that 100<sup>th</sup> person that tips us over the cusp from the what we are to what we can become, from pessimism to optimism, from dogged effort to effortless joy. We need new members.

But having said all that, it is equally important to say we need every member that is already here.

One of my purely secular passions is watching a game of hockey. My wife and I are season ticket holders to the San Jose Sharks and if time and tide allowed we would be at the San Jose Arena yelling our hearts out 42 times a year. We're blindly partisan. We wear the team colors. We've been known to boo.

**Over the years we have done a fair amount of thinking about what makes for a winning team. It's clearly not just a matter of money. The New York Rangers that consistently have one of the largest payrolls hasn't made it to the playoffs for the last 6 years. The best 16 teams make it to the playoffs.**

**Some of the things we have noticed that do make a difference would include having a good mixture of veterans and new recruits. We've seen that it's important to maintain an environment where everyone participant feels appreciated, the flashy forward with 30 goals and the solid defenseman who has none. On successful teams players are always trying to pass the compliments around and no one is crowing "I'm the man!"**

**100 is a meaningless addition unless the 99 are already creating an environment where harmony is at home.**

**The truth of Paul's passage read this morning is that the church, this church, needs everyone, and we need an environment where everyone's contributions are honored. We need the bean counter, the Mr.-Fix-it, the gad fly and the worry wart. We need the seeker and we need the person who has never once questioned the reality of God. The musician can not say to the usher: "We have no need of you." The usher can not say to the disruptive toddler, "We could do without you, today." We need everyone and one day, as the 99 are working hard at being faithful, the 100<sup>th</sup> member will come along and the added energy will tip us from what we have been to what we shall be – from pessimism to optimism – from dogged effort to effortless joy.**

**And there is one more thing that Paul makes plain. We need God. Positive transitions are never perfectly mapped. Over the years I've noticed that what happens in a faithful church is not what I planned, not what the Board planned but something even better. The future will be God's future. If we are faithful there will be Quantum leaps and oceans o'erbound.**

**"The eye cannot say to the ear, 'I have no need of you!'" Let those who have ears to hear, hear Paul's message: There is a wonderful future for those who welcome the stranger and live in harmony."**