

If you've been on social media in the last week or watched GMA or Today you have probably heard *something* about this whole *Onyx Storm* thing. It was a book released this past Tuesday, which has been highly, passionately anticipated by flocks and flocks of fantasy readers. It's the third book in a series that is essentially about dragons and their riders. Now trust me, this is going somewhere...

I just finished the second book so I didn't have to have a massive wait in between installments, and God help me because this is how my brain works, there was a scene that I just kept going back to as I read the lessons this week. It's in the culminating battle at the end of the book and everything is just pure chaos in the sky. There are dragons everywhere and things are just bonkers. Part of the deal when you bond with a dragon is that you are imbued with some sort of gift, some sort of talent that manifests from their magic. It might be healing or time manipulation or anything like that. Well, in this final scene, there are four members of a squad left fighting for their lives and for each other. One of them gets hurt and is left in a very precarious situation. What followed was a breakneck paced scene where one of them essentially teleported a piece of weaponry out of someone's hand, but then it broke so she had to teleport it to another member whose gift was fusing metals. He fused it and then tossed it

someone else, who could control electricity and she imbued the knife with enough power to take their enemy down. I've summed this up horribly and if you've read the book, don't judge the summary, but what it boiled down to was that without each of their gifts being present, their fourth member was going to die, there was zero question about it. Everything had to work perfectly, all of them in sync, each of their gifts utterly necessary and vital in order to save Sawyer's life. If one of them wasn't there, it all would have fallen apart. They needed each other and their gifts to make this happen. And see? Just like that we're into our lessons.

Bless the Corinthian problem children. If Paul was a Southerner there would have been *a lot* of bless your hearts riddled throughout these letters, because lordy if they don't just like to befuddle things to the nth degree. The majority of Corinth's issues spring from the fact that they are a new church community who come from a world with a very specific set of rules and expectations. Corinth was a beacon of wealth in the ancient world. It was positioned strategically along the Mediterranean that allowed for a canal to run through the city and connect the east with the inner parts of Greece. All imports and exports ran through Corinth and the people knew it, they thrived off of it, they built their lives upon this identity. They were a wealthy town and they lived accordingly. This was a community that was

used to lavish things and used to a society that functioned centering around who had the most wealth, who was in charge, and who listened to whom. In an economic society, this makes sense, it works, it's logical. In a Christian society, this all falls catastrophically apart and they don't know how to handle it and thus they turn to Paul.

They are desperate for Paul to help them make sense of their new community, to help it fit into boxes that they understand, to help them all fit into roles that adhere to their typical expectations, and Paul, bless their hearts, just basically tells them...no...it's not like that, it can't be like that, it shouldn't be like that amongst you. What the Corinthians want Paul to tell them is who is the best, who is at the top of the heap and then what does the organizational flow chart look like from the top down? They want to know *how* to differentiate themselves? Who should be the most important? What gifts should we be valuing above others? How should we arrange ourselves based on a logical set of criteria? Again, when you're used to a business economy, where everyone knows their role, and wealth is the biggest indicator of basically every part of your life, their questions make sense, and it makes you realize how hard Paul's answer was going to be to swallow.

Paul tells them to throw the flow chart out the window. All the old ways are gone, and they must start thinking of each other in a new way—

like a body, like the body of Christ. They have to stop looking for who is better and who is the best. They have to stop trying to figure out what is the most coveted spot and who can be disregarded. What they must realize in order to move forward is that everyone is valuable, everyone has a place, and there is zero need of a rank and file system, because without each person the whole thing falls apart, and he goes about explaining this with a brilliant level of logic, that an intelligent society has to respect.

Imagine a body. An ear shouldn't feel any less necessary and important because it's not an eye. We need hearing, we need sight. If we only had eyes, but the rest of our senses were gone, it would be hard to function. An eye can't tell the hands they aren't needed. You might think something is meaningless, can be disposed of and Paul says *that* is the most important thing. It's like how you don't pay attention to your toes until you hurt one of them and then your balance goes all haywire and you realize how vital your toes are. You don't pay attention to your fingernails until one breaks and then you try to open something without them. Every part is necessary. Every part has a role. You can't go it alone, just a hand doing hand things irrespective of the world around you. You can't ignore the things you deem unimportant because you never know you might need those things to stay upright. Every thing, every gift, every role, every person is

vital and necessary to this community they are building. There is no hierarchy because if one falls, they all fall, if one suffers, they all suffer. This is their new foundation, where all are welcome and all have a place.

I am not sure there has ever been a time where this message has been more vital. *Everyone* is needed. *Everyone* has a place. *Every single person* has value. And suddenly we live in a world where that is a controversial statement. To say that everyone has a gift and a role to play is a gospel statement and yet the world around us is rife with orders that say that that isn't true anymore. I think, we as a community want to profess that we believe what Paul has written, that we're all needed, we're all necessary, we are all one together. But what about our kids that use different pronouns? What about our members of the LGBTQIA+ community? What about our members who work with communities that have undocumented people in them? Are they suddenly not necessary? Are they suddenly less than? Is it suddenly *their* suffering and since it has nothing to do with us, we're immune from the impacts, even though we say word of God word of life that when one suffers we all suffer? When one of us is hurting, when the world strikes out against one of us as the body of Christ, we are all hurting and we are all being struck at because we are one body and we can't do this without every fingernail, toe, elbow, gallbladder, and capillary.

We are now in a time where the legitimate gospel message of Jesus saying to welcome the stranger, free the oppressed, and release the captives has been called unintelligent and uninformed. We are now in a time when we as the church are going to have to decide who we are and whose we are, if we are going to stand up for all of our siblings, or rest on our Corinthian laurels and say well, we're higher up on the totem pole and more important so the rest of the people can figure it out for themselves. The body of Christ goes well beyond our four walls. It applies to every single child of God on this planet and there are far too many of God's beloved, wonderfully created children suffering that we are just ignoring because what are they to us? They are our heart, our eyes, our feet. They are a necessary and vital part of this body that is going to cease to be the body of Christ if we continue to ignore the pleas of our siblings.

Wednesday morning I woke up to a text from my sister. And it was a picture of a sign they had on the front lawn of their church, a sign made by their synod that said, this is Christ's house and all have a place here. And there was a heart made of a rainbow colors with a cross. All are welcome was the message. That sign had been up for three years and Tuesday night someone came onto their property and sliced it in half with a knife, because declaring that all were welcome, all had a place, all were valued was a

message that was seen as a threat. And there will be questions, do we put the sign back up? Do we lie low? Do we make the gospel quieter? And as her baby sister I don't know what I want the answer to be, but as a member of the body of Christ, I know what it should be.

The time is quickly coming for the church to decide who it is and what it is going to stand for. We proclaim that we believe in a Messiah who came to free the oppressed, give sight to the blind, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. We proclaim to be a Lutheran church built on Paul's teachings about grace and faith. We proclaim it, but do we believe it? Do we live it? The last time I checked we don't serve communion based on gifts, based on who we think is best. We don't check people's pronouns at the rail. The last time I checked when Christ begged from the cross that God forgive us because we know not what we do, he didn't give a lot of caveats about documentation and sexual orientation. If a bunch of made up dragon riders need each other to survive, how much more does the body of Christ need one another? We can pretend we don't or pretend that we don't need *them*, but we do. We need each other, exactly as we are, with all of our gifts in whatever package we come in, everyone working together for the kingdom, because without each other? Well...I just don't know what happens next... **AMEN!!!**