

3rd Sunday after Epiphany – January 27, 2013

The Rev. John A. Mennell

My partner is totally awesome. And she did not even pay me to say that. This time. Being in a good relationship often means finding a lot of mutual interests – things that we can do together and reflect on later.

Because I am so in love, this past weekend I took her out of town. All the way to Parsippany. For the Diocesan convention. Picture it as going down the block to a two day meeting. I'm just that kind.

But there are lots of other things we do together that are very enjoyable. We love to try new foods, go for long walks around Montclair on our off day, discuss theology, watch the snow fly. The list goes on. I think one of the things about a good partner is that they can make anything fun. Even Diocesan Convention. Something would happen and I'd get a text from across the great ballroom where 500 Episcopalians from all over North Jersey would gathered. My favorite of the weekend was after someone said something ridiculous, and I was scratching my head – my phone lit up with the words 'Did he really just say that in public?'

So aside from convention, which we were required to attend, she often comes up with some really great ideas of stuff we should do. I have come to trust her instincts pretty well. Hey John there's a new restaurant that just opened on Church street do you want to go? Sure, let's try it! There's new exhibit at the MOMA in New York. Yeah, lets go? One of my parishioners wants to take us skeet shooting. Wow I'll try it. Hey John, doesn't one of your parishioners own the a dance studio on Bloomfield Avenue – we

should take lessons. Hey...

OK. Maybe..

I actually wasn't so reluctant at first. Because it did seem like a good idea. Sonia likes to dance. But I...at my best... have two left feet.

And its not like I haven't had dance lessons before. You certainly wouldn't know if you watched me move or got trampled on by me. But for whatever reason, I just cant dance. So after signing up for the lessons – to be taken some time in the future – I have completely chickened out. I get a call from someone at the studio about once a month. Mr. Mennell...you have paid for the lessons.. we were just wondering... Every now and then Sonia will remember too and say “You know, we should probably take those lessons...

To me it just another example of the fear I have about not being able to do something well. The fear of failure that probably haunts everyone of us at some time or another. Believe me, I don't mind dancing if nobody is watching. Music moves you and begs you to move. But as soon as I realize someone is watching me I return to stiff Zombie mode.

We don't like to fail. We don't like to think that we might fail. Not only is our fear of failure limiting, often our perception of failure is limiting too. We think so often that not only should we not do something, but then we think that what we do is not good enough. We wish we could dance like Fred Astaire, sing like Whitney Houston, play football like the Peyton brothers, make money like Warren Buffett, or create like Steve Jobs.

We get so caught up in our perceived lack of gifts that we don't have, that we fail to notice what we can offer. We fail to notice the gifts that we do have. We forget that we actually have something to offer. Something to offer in the name of God. Something to offer as the living body of God.

It's the point that is made so beautifully by Paul in reading from Corinthians today. This reading is not about being the best, the strongest and the most successful, but is about a God who acknowledges the weakness that we all have and how important those weakness are as they complement other parts. The analogy that Paul uses is of the body. The body that I want to think of is this one that is gathered here today.

There is so much that is accomplished at St. Luke's each week in the name of God. It's not because we are all good at everything. It is because each of us has particular gifts and is willing to use them. We have to not let the fear of failure keep us from the success that we can find in God.

It is the unsung heroes that make this place dance week in and week out. It is a dance that all of us can do. Even if we have two left feet, or quite frankly even if we cannot walk.

It reminds of a conversation that I had with an older parishioner who can't make it to church too often anymore. I was talking with her and she remembered when she was in charge of this and that, and on every other committee of the church. She said to me, "All I do now is come to church, and I don't even come very often."

But when she does come, she inspires me, and she inspires others. That is what I tried to explain to her. The task of coming to church is a challenge enough. She has to get someone to drive

her. And she had to have someone help her in the door. And someone else would help take her to coffee hour.

But she was here. It inspired others to come. And that is enough. That is more than enough.

This passage from Corinthians talks about how the parts of the body are all dependent on each other. We are dependent on each other as the body of Christ. This dear sweet soul was dependent on others to come to church. We are dependent on others when we are here and in the world. No offering is too small, no gift too insignificant, to make a difference in what we do.

My favorite line in this passage is “The head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you. On the contrary, the members of the body that seem the weakest are indispensable.

Now my head, has in fact said to my feet, I have no need of you, but that was only on the dance floor. My feet have been quite useful for getting my head to and from places it needed to be.

But think about what this means for us – and our fears of failure, our fears of not being enough. The parts that seem to be the weakest are indispensable. What this means is that you are indispensable to God. What you have to offer is indispensable to God. I love this idea and what it means for how we should approach God and life. We have to try. We have to try new things. We have to know that with God, we are good enough.

It all reminds me of the famous William Purkey quote “You've gotta dance like there's nobody watching, Love like you'll never be hurt, Sing like there's nobody listening, And live like it's heaven on earth.”

So what is the dance that you are afraid of? The thing that you are not doing because you might not do it right? What is the thing in this place that you want to get involved in? Because you are curious and think it might just be fun? Remember, it takes all of us with the gifts we have to make this body work. It takes all of us to learn about our faith. It takes all of us to serve those in need.

Come on. Let's dance