

St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX, 1-23-22 **We Are All One In Mission**

I Corinthians 12:12 -31a The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be 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 cease to be 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 arranged 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 combined the members of the body and has given 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. 28 And in the church, God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

The apostle Paul was writing to a congregation in a city that had a wide diversity of people and religious practices. These differences ultimately contributed to a division of the church at Corinth.

Paul likened the church to the human body. Just as a single body is one and yet is composed of many parts, so it is with those who are in Christ. "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, - and all were made to drink of one Spirit." Paul urged Christians not to value any person less than another. Everyone is needed in the body, despite their many different talents or functions. The body must remain together if it is to survive.

Christ's church is a place where every person's gifts need to be honored. It is also a place where everyone's spiritual needs can be fulfilled. We all have our imperfections, but we are all

drawn together by the One Who shall make each of us perfect in the coming kingdom.

That we, with all our differences, can be drawn together in Word and Sacrament, in service and in witness, means that God is truly present in our midst.

This is our mission to the rest of the world: having lived together despite our differences and disagreements, we can proclaim to others that it is only through God's power that we have true unity. There is a place and a function for all of us. We are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Our mission is what is immediately around us each day.

Paul's analogy reminds me of a song by Bob Dylan called "A Hard Rain Is Gonna Fall." One of the verses reminds me of Paul saying, "If all were an eye,..." What did you see my blue-eyed son, what did you see my darling young one? I saw a new born babe with the wild wolves upon it, I saw a highway of golden with nobody on it. I saw a black branch with the blood, it kept dripping, saw a room full of men with their hammers a bleeding. I saw a white ladder all covered with water, saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children." If all were an eye, we would have only that input of joy or sorrow, of tragedy or victory. If all were an eye, we would only see. We would register what is going on. We could only tell others what we saw, but ... wait, we are not a mouth, so we could not tell or hear.

Paul says, "If all were an ear...." Dylan writes, "What did you hear my blue eyed son, what did you hear my darling young one? I heard the roar of a thunder, it roared out a warning. I heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world. I heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a blazing. I heard ten thousand whispering and nobody listening. I heard the sound of a poet who died in a gutter. I heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley. I heard the sound of one person who cried he was human."

So then, what do we do with the sounds of the world around us? What do we hear? We can only register the sounds, if we were only an ear. We couldn't speak a warning. We are not a mouth, not to mention there is no brain attached nor a heart to keep the brain alive.

What if we were all hands, then? We could comfort and caress, defend and feed and point. Dylan writes, "Who did you meet my blue eyed son? Whom did you meet my darling young one? I met a young child beside a dead pony. I met a white man who walked a black dog. I met one man who was wounded in love. I met another man who was wounded in hatred. I met a young girl her body was burning. I met another girl who gave me a rainbow." What can the hands do? They can touch the world in its joy and pain. They can feed if they could only know who to feed or clothe or visit or heal. But if all were a unity, then we might be able to follow Dylan's final verse.

"What do you do now my blue-eyed son? What do you do now my darling young one? Well, I'm going back out before the rain starts a falling. And I'll walk to the depths of the deepest dark

ocean where the people are many and their hands are all empty, where the pellets of poison or flooding my waters, where the home in the valley meets the dark dirty prison, where the executioner's face is always well hidden, where hunger is ugly, where souls are forgotten, where black is the color and none is the number and I'll see it and tell it and think it and breathe it and reflect from the mountains so all folks can see it and I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinking, but I'll know my song well before I start singing and it's a hard, hard, hard, hard, it's a hard rain that's gonna fall." Our mission is supported by hymns like 755 in the blue book. Take a look at it. (Pause)

1) We are all one in mission. We are all one in call. Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all. A single great commission compels us from above to plan and work together that all may know Christ's love. (Say the second verse with me in unison)

2) We are all called to service, to witness in God's name. Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same: to touch the lives of others with God's surprising grace, so every folk and nation may feel God's warm embrace. Stay with me...

3) Now let us be united and let our song be heard. Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming Word. We are all one in mission, we all are one in call, our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all."

You are gifted. We are called to be one in mission. It is reflected in Jesus' John 19 prayer, that we might all be one. Is everyone an eye? A Lutheran? Is everyone an ear? A Catholic? Is everyone a hand? A Baptist? Is everyone a foot? A Presbyterian? How do you think God views this? I don't think He minds our many families of faith in Christ. His concern is are we working together in mission and in love, to glorify God and to edify others! To love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself!

When we tear each other down within a congregation or a denomination or between denominations or tear down anyone, that certainly causes Him pain. We are all one in mission, but we may not recognize it. In fact, do we not keep each other on our toes because we are different? Some emphasize evangelism, some Holy Communion, some preaching, some helping the poor. Those who do those things well, we can learn from and others can learn from us.

You are gifted for that mission. Don't wait for the pastor to ask you to use your gift. As a congregation, we have a variety of gifts. We have people in administration, in teaching, in visiting and in finding ways to care for others. It's a blessing to hear how important you are to God, and to know He will use you to build up others, to build up the Kingdom.

Peterson says in his paraphrase of our text: "But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be

a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way-the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach.

When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance."

You are Christ's body-that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body":

Apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers. Helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues.

But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some may compete for the so-called "important" parts.

You have the gift of the Holy Spirit. So, in the church, the body of Christ, 100% are gifted. That makes us equals since we are gifted by the Holy Spirit. The specific gift or gifts He has given you puts you in the servant role to others. God called you through your baptism to use your gift. So, if we have all these spiritual gifts, let us use them.

It is perhaps because we haven't unwrapped those gifts, like Christmas presents you forgot to put under the tree and found later. Do you want to put them back on the shelf and save them for next year or unwrap them now? It's your choice.

Power is unleashed when we submit ourselves to Jesus. He can use us to change the world. Gifts from the Holy Spirit are not yours, not for or to you, but are through you for the good of the whole community.

Seek God's will and submit to His call so that more will know of His love. Others are helped and so are you. For we are all one in mission no matter what hard rain is going to fall. God bless and encourage you as you consider His call and His gift to you. Amen