

“One Body”

A recent retiree, two small business owners, an accountant, an environmental engineer, a real-estate broker, and a set of jumper cables walk into a restaurant. The hostess looks them over and says, "I'll serve you, but don't start anything."

Ok, I admit that was pretty bad. But the truth is a group of men, minus the jumper cables of course, from Hope Lutheran did walk into a restaurant the other night. They were different ages. They all had different life experiences. They all had different spiritual gifts. This was a group of men who gathered together for some food and some fellowship who, if they had not met each other here at Hope, most likely wouldn't have met each other at all. But there they were hanging out together, listening to each other, and supporting each other. Now to someone who might have seen these guys at the restaurant that night, they would have seen six individuals, right? Of course. But what I pictured in my mind, after one of the men told me about this gathering, was not six individuals but six individuals unified in Christ. What I pictured was one body.

This sort of thing happens a lot in our congregation — probably even more than I'm aware of. People, not just associating with those they are most comfortable with or those they have the most in common with, but people who see their diversity, especially when it comes to spiritual gifts as a benefit to our mission of proclaiming and living the word and love of Christ. Lots of us here at Hope know that it is the unity of the body — the one body made up of many diverse parts all with different functions, that work together for the common good. Many of us know this but perhaps some of us don't.

There are those of us who might think that being a part of a congregation is strictly a personal thing. Make no mistake, it is very personal but it is also a body- a body of Christ. It is a body of Christ made up of individuals all with some unique gifts.

Of course, there are those of us who know that we have certain unique gifts, but we don't let anyone else know about them because then we might be asked to do something. We're busy people. The word gets out that we have gifts of administration or

care-giving, or teaching and the next thing we know, we are signed up to do one more thing when our calendars are already full! Or, maybe there are those of us who know that we have certain spiritual gifts but instead of sharing them with the body, we judge ourselves and our gifts against others. Maybe we think our gifts are too insignificant to matter. Or maybe we think our gifts are superior and instead of sharing them, we whisper behind the scenes about how we could do things better than the people who are actually doing them. It's sad but true. But these examples and the many more like them are not unifying are they? These examples are not the way to work together for the common good. And these examples are nothing new in the church.

The Church at Corinth, in which Paul writes two letters certainly had some "issues." Read about all kinds of them in the first 11 chapters of his first letter. And they had some issues in the understanding of their spiritual gifts as well. It is this issue, which Paul addresses in Chapter 12. Paul is not scolding them but reminding them that the Triune God- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is at the center of all spiritual gifts and He empowers them all. In our reading today, Paul seeks to unite the Corinthians by reminding them that one's individual spiritual gifts do make up the body but that it's not all about them as individuals. It's about the one body of Christ.

Follow along with me and listen again to verses 12-14. "For just as the body is **one** and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are **one** body, so it is with Christ. For in **one** Spirit, we were all baptized into **one** body - Jews or Greeks, slaves, or free- and all were made to drink of **one** Spirit. For the body does not consist of **one** member but of many." Did you pick up on a word that you heard the most in those verses? The word is *one*. For in **one** Spirit, we were baptized into **one** body and all were made to drink of **one** Spirit. For the body does not consist of **one** member but of many. *One* is key to our understanding of what Paul is writing here and the word *one* is key to our understanding of who we are as a unified people in Christ.

The unity starts in baptism. For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body. The unity continues in what God has arranged. God put the Corinthians in their congregation. He knew they were all different but he also knew their faith in Jesus would be the unifying factor in the midst of all their diversity that would enable them to be Christ's body in the world and to proclaim Him as Lord. Listen again to verse 18; "God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." And verse 20; "As it is there are many parts yet one body." The same is true for you and me. God has put us in this congregation—many parts yet one body. We are baptized into the

one body of Christ. God has arranged us where we are today in this congregation. So, now what?

It's actually quite simple—it's time for everyone to contribute. Now before you think that I just suggested that we must do something in order to get what we need from God, it's actually the opposite. We work together, contributing in our own unique ways for the common good because of the eternal gift we have been given. I remind you of what Paul writes in verse 3 in this same chapter- a verse that we read last week. "No one can say Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit." Without the help of the Spirit we cannot express Jesus as Lord. And without Christ, we are nothing because without Christ, we have no access to God. But God, out of his love for us gives us something none of us deserve and now, through our faith in the crucified and risen Christ, we stand united in the one body of Christ. We aren't just a bunch of lucky individuals who happen to believe the same thing and who just happen to meet here every weekend to have our needs met. We are a unified people from different backgrounds and walks of life who have been baptized into the one body of Christ and saved by God's grace.

And to make this whole thing even more real and understandable, Paul helps us see this unity from the aspect of our own bodies. Our bodies are one with many parts that rely and need each other. He points out that the parts that might seem weak are actually indispensable. God made the body that way with each part contributing in their own unique way. All of the parts make it whole, complete, and functioning the way God created it to function. And he made the body of Christ that way too.

Paul writes beginning in verse 24 that, "God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that all the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, we all rejoice together." How awesome a picture is this? All of us make this thing work! Just think about how many lives that could be changed through the love of Christ if we actually approached the body this way?

You know, I firmly believe that we think of the one body this way that it's not that hard to go out and give witness to Christ. It's not that hard to get together with other members of the body who might need a listening ear or some other kind of spiritual support. It's not that hard to volunteer to help us lead one of our youth groups or teach a class. It's not that hard to volunteer for Habitat, Hope Chest, or Night to Shine. It's not that hard because we are those who have been given new life in the forgiveness of our sins. With that

in mind, we are simply sharing our spiritual gifts while proclaiming Jesus as Lord. It's what we do.

Paul wraps up the 12th chapter of his letter to the Corinthians this way. "Now you are the body of Christ." It was true for the Corinthians and for you and me today. Out of love for the one who loved us so much that he came into this sinful world, lived and died for us. Out of love for the one who was raised again to give new life to the kingdom of God, of which Jesus and only Jesus is Lord, we simply do what God has enabled us to do in the place he has put us to do it. In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**