

ONE BODY, MANY MEMBERS
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany, 2022
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading heard earlier, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a: **¹² For, as the body is one and yet has many members and as all the members of the body are one body, although they are many, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink of that one Spirit.**

¹⁴ For indeed the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it does not for that reason cease to belong to the body. ¹⁶ If the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it does not for that reason cease to belong to the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ However, now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He has wished. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," or again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." ²² No, much rather, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ We bestow greater honour on those members of the body that we think are less honourable, and our unrepresentable members have greater modesty, ²⁴ which our presentable parts do not need. However, God has composed the body and given greater honour to the member that lacks it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same concern for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it; or, if one member is honoured, all the other members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and members individually. ²⁸ God has appointed in the church first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then charismatic gifts of healing, helpful deeds, positions of administration and different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all work miracles, do they? ³⁰ Not all have charismatic gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they? ³¹ Eagerly desire the greater gifts!

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Gospel reading from last Sunday told the story of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding of Cana and how there He both revealed the glory of His divine majesty and blessed the newlyweds and their guests with a generous gift of water turned to a large quantity of high-quality wine.¹ Jesus' presence at a wedding and His using it as the occasion to begin to show the world who He really is and what He's come to do also reminds us that Jesus is often referred to in the Scripture as "*the Bridegroom of the Church*." This is more than a mere figure of speech or parable-like illustration. Just as a couple entering into marriage become one flesh with each other, so it is also with Christ and those who come to faith in Him. He gives His very body, blood, and Spirit over to the faithful, and we, in turn, give our bodies to Him - we set ourselves aside for His purposes and not for our own and become one flesh with Him.

Today, the Apostle Paul is taking this line of thinking to the next level. Writing to the fractured and contentious church at Corinth, where the members were virtually at war with one another, Paul reminds them that, having come to faith in Jesus, they are united with Christ as His *bride*. They are one flesh with Him: and not just independently. It's not like Christ is a polygamist with hundreds of different wives. No, there is only one holy, Christian, and apostolic Church: only one bride of Christ that consists of all those who know the Lord Jesus and trust Him as their Saviour from sin. They receive the gift of His body and blood given for their lives and the forgiveness of their sins, and they, in turn, worship Him with their bodies as their crucified, risen, and glorified King. Being one flesh with Christ, they are also one flesh with each other.

Paul tells us, "**For by one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body.**" It doesn't make any difference who you are or where you came from; Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, young or old - every one of us has had the same rebirth in Holy Baptism. Every one of us believes in Jesus by virtue of the work of the same Holy Spirit - the

¹ John 2:1-11

same Spirit we drink in whenever and as often as the Word of God is proclaimed among us. We are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a member of Him. This is the way we should think of ourselves: as the various parts and members of one body, each of us performing the roles we've been given for the health and wellbeing of the whole.

From this basic concept, Paul draws several lessons, the first being that no one is independent.

Paul utterly destroys the myth of the lone Christian when he says, **“If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it does not for that reason cease to belong to the body.”**

Within the deeply divided Corinthian congregation, there were various factions, all striving for supremacy and control over the others. They were constantly showing off their spiritual gifts to “out-Christian” one another and prove that they were better or more spiritual. And it seems that when some didn't get their way, or when they were given roles they perceived as being less glamorous than others, they went off in a huff, essentially taking their marbles and going home. *“If I can't have it my way or if I can't do the job I think I'm best suited for, well, then forget it. I'm out of here.”* Such an attitude is simply unchristian. It denies the organic unity we have as the one body of Christ. Whenever we find ourselves thinking this way, we ought to recognise it for the wretched sin that it is and *repent of it*.

Paul goes on to show that in our one body, we need a wide variety of parts, each performing their own individual functions. He writes, **“If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?”** The idea is that if we're all trying to do the same job within the church, then any number of other vitally necessary tasks won't be accomplished. It's the Lord who builds His church. He has brought us together as His body in this congregation. He has assembled this group with the right mix of talents and gifts and strengths and skills to accomplish what He wants to be done here. Therefore each of us is to use those talents and gifts that God has given in whatever roles we are assigned *for the good of the whole body*.

Now Paul really gets into the meat of this lesson when he writes, **“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” or again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.”** There is no member of Christ's body whom we don't need. It's pretty obvious: an eye would be in a world of hurt if it didn't have a hand to wipe away foreign objects, and a head without feet would be unable to move. So it is also with us - even when it's not obvious what a particular member's function is supposed to be. Remember, it's the Lord who put us together, and He is a lot wiser than we are. There is no such thing as a worthless Christian. The Lord has a plan and purpose for each of us that in some way serves the greater good of the whole body.

In fact, Paul makes a point of lifting up those members who are judged by others to be pathetic or ignoble. **“The members of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ We bestow greater honour on those members of the body that we think are less honourable, and our unpresentable members have greater modesty,”** he says.

What Paul is referring to here are those parts of our bodies that we normally keep clothed and that perform such tasks as reproduction and the removal of wastes. They're vital tasks. They absolutely need to be done, but we don't normally discuss them in polite company. No. And when you see that young fellow who for some unfathomable reason thinks it's fashionable to wear the top of his pants around his knees, or the young lady with a hemline that's short enough to be called “cheeky,” you want to say, “Show a little less skin and some more modesty, thank you. I don't want to see that. Please, keep it covered.”

In the same way, we are to cover each other - cover each other with love and forgiveness, kindness and understanding, patience and peace - and especially those members who are in one way or another struggling the most and that we in our sinful natures tend to look down on. Those who are disabled physically or challenged mentally, those who are plagued with an addiction, those whose attendance or giving record is less than stellar - who don't seem to be pulling their weight, those whose faith is shaky or underdeveloped, those who are in financial trouble, the grieving, the sick, the lonely, the broken-hearted - they don't need our judgment. They don't need our condemnation or cold shoulders. *They need our help and encouragement*. They need our care and concern. And we need to recognise and embrace them as members of the one body of which we are a part.

This is what Paul means when he says, **“If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it.”** When you stub your toe, your hands reach down immediately to embrace it, and then you hop around in a circle, hollering at the top of your lungs. It's a total body experience. That's how the church ought to be toward a member who is suffering in any way. We all join in the relief effort.

Likewise, Paul says we share in each other's successes and triumphs. **“If one member is honoured, all the other members rejoice with it.”** The crown of life is worn on the head, but the whole body enjoys the benefits of Christ's

redemptive work. In the same way, when one member of the church is honoured or gifted in any way, we all benefit, and we rejoice in what the Lord has done for them.

What has now been described here today is the goal. It's the way things ought to be in the church, which is the one body of Christ. I'm sure we all see a vast yawning chasm between the way things are and the way they ought to be. But to reach the goal, we have to know what it is and what it looks like, and then we can identify the problem. It's not Christ's fault that we fall short of the mark. He has done and continues to do all that is necessary for us. He has given us His very life on the cross. He has united us with Him in His death and resurrection in Holy Baptism, by which He has also forgiven our sins and given us His Holy Spirit. He also continues to give us His Word, His Spirit, His blood, and His body to make us the one body of Christ. What stands in the way of us actually acting as His body should is our continuing sin. It's our selfishness, our pride, and our lack of love for the other members of His body. From all such sins, we need to repent. We need to repent whenever and as often as they arise within our dark hearts. Then receiving the Word of Christ's infinite forgiveness again and empowered by His Spirit who enables us to do supernatural things, with faith and hope in the promises of God, we can at very least make progress toward the goal.

May Christ in His mercy grant it to us, His one body. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for wanting all people to worship You in spirit and in truth, and for making that possible by the light of Your Word. We, Your people, who have gathered to worship and praise You, now offer You our thanksgiving, praise, and prayer.

We thank You, Father, for sending Your Son Jesus Christ, and for making known through Him Your loving purpose that all who believe in Him may have everlasting life. We give You thanks for our redemption through His cross, for the forgiveness of our sins, for deliverance from all evil, and for the sure hope of eternal glory. We praise You for the gift of Your infallible Word, through which Your Spirit has given us saving faith. Send forth Your Word with power so that many may come from east and west and rejoice in Your saving mercy. May Your kingdom be filled with believers from every nation and tribe though they are sinners like ourselves, so that heaven and earth together may ring with praise for Your great salvation in Christ.

Renew our minds. Cleanse us from every sin. Lead us along the path to eternal life. Grant that we may trust Your love and power. As we live out our short spans of life, make us spiritually wise, so that in humility, forgiveness, and love, even to those who hate us, we may reflect Your grace. Help us so that we may not be conquered by evil, but may rather conquer all evil with good. Grant that we may use well the charismatic gifts that You have provided for the good of all. Heal us of every disease. Uphold those who face the test of sickness or other suffering. Guard our loved ones wherever they may be. Shield us from the powers of wickedness. Give us each day our daily bread, and make us contented in every circumstance.

Watch over Your Church. Give it pastors who are true shepherds and faithful teachers of Your people.

Give wisdom and understanding to those who are entrusted with the responsibilities of governing our country. Grant them a concern for Your will, and the desire to rule in such a way that all people may live in quietness and peace.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer who loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

¹ All the people gathered like one man in the square in front of the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to fetch the scroll of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel to follow. ² Then Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which included men and women and all the others who could understand what they heard. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read aloud from it as he faced the square that is in front of the Water Gate from

daybreak until noon in the presence of the men and the women and others who could understand. All the people listened to the scroll of the Law...

⁵ When Ezra opened the book, all the people could see him, because he was standing higher than all the other people were. When he opened it, all the people stood.

⁶ Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen! Amen!" as they raised their hands. Then they bowed down with their faces to the ground and worshipped the LORD...

⁸ They read the scroll of the Law of God clearly, giving the meaning, and so the people understood what was being read. ⁹ Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra, the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who were instructing the people, told all the people: “This day is holy to the LORD, your God. Do not mourn and do not weep!”

For all the people were weeping while they were listening to the Words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then Nehemiah told them: “Go, eat fat meat, drink sweet drinks and send portions of food to anyone who has nothing prepared! For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be distressed! For the joy that you have in the LORD is your fortress.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

¹² For, as the body is one and yet has many members and as all the members of the body are one body, although they are many, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink of that one Spirit.

¹⁴ For indeed the body is not one member but many.

¹⁵ If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it does not for that reason cease to belong to the body. ¹⁶ If the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it does not for that reason cease to belong to the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ However, now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He has wished.

¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” or again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.”

²² No, much rather, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ We bestow greater honour on those members of the body that we think are less honourable, and our unrepresentable members have greater modesty, ²⁴ which our representable parts do not need. However, God has composed the body and given greater honour to the member that lacks it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same concern for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it; or, if one member is honoured, all the other members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and members individually. ²⁸ God has appointed in the church first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly

teachers, then miracles, then charismatic gifts of healing, helpful deeds, positions of administration and different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all work miracles, do they? ³⁰ Not all have charismatic gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they? ³¹ Eagerly desire the greater gifts!

Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶ Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. On the Sabbath He went into the synagogue, as His custom was, and stood up to read.

¹⁷ He was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, He found the place where Scripture had said: ¹⁸ **“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed, and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord.”**

²⁰ He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ He began to tell them, “Today, while you are listening, this passage of Scripture has been fulfilled.”

²² All spoke well of Him and were astonished at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth. They were asking, “Is This not Joseph’s son?”

²³ He told them: “You will surely say this proverb to Me, ‘Doctor, heal yourself!’ and say, ‘Do the same things here in Your hometown as we have heard that You have done at Capernaum!’” ²⁴ He added, “Truly, I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

²⁵ However, I tell you truly, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months and there was a severe famine all over the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to **a widow at Zarephath in the territory of Sidon.** ²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha. Yet none of them was **made clean**, only **Naaman** the Syrian.”

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were filled with anger when they heard these things. ²⁹ They got up, drove Him out of the city and took Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, to throw Him down the cliff. ³⁰ However, He walked right through them and went on His way.