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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 30, 2022
4th Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-6; Luke 4:14-21

Hymns: 224; 408; 400; 453:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27

¹²For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴For in fact the body is not one member but many.

¹⁵If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling?

¹⁸But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹And if they were all one member, where *would be* the body *be*?

²⁰But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ...

²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Jesus' Spirit anointed role as the Christ

Just think if Jesus didn't think it important to fill His role in the world. He had enough things going on in His life. After all, He had a construction business to run, a mother and siblings to support! What if He just couldn't be bothered with spiritual stuff? What if He just went to church, (actually synagogue) on Saturdays, when He didn't have other things to do, and if nothing else came up, and went about His life doing the best He could for Himself and His family?

Well, that's ludicrous, isn't it? In our gospel lesson we read how Jesus went about doing what He was anointed by the Holy Spirit to do. He went around teaching and preaching the truth of salvation. Jesus recognized the truth about who He was and what His place was in the world and in the Kingdom of God. In the synagogue in Nazareth, where He had grown up Jesus stood and read from the prophet Isaiah the words of our Old Testament lesson: ¹⁸“*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,*

Because He has anointed Me

To preach the gospel to the poor;

He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,

To proclaim liberty to the captives

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

¹⁹*To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”* (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus understood that He had a place in the Kingdom of God, and a responsibility to fulfill that calling. Our eternal salvation depended on it.

In our sermon text this morning the same Holy Spirit that anointed Jesus to be the Christ has a message for us about --

THEME: Our Place in the Body of Christ.

First let us fully understand that this was not a matter of our personal choice. The Spirit leads us into --

I. Knowing How We Got There, that is in the Body of Christ.

It is a wonder of God's grace that we are a part of the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul uses the human body as an illustration of the dynamics of the Holy Christian Church.

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” (v.12-13)

First, we need to appreciate the premise: **we are part of the body of Christ**. Each and every believer no matter what our background, or nationality, or ethnicity, or language, each and every believer has been incorporated into the body of Christ. Being many, we are **one body**. This is a **gift**, not a burden. It is a gift of God's grace.

How did it happen? Paul points to baptismal grace. When we think of the blessings of our baptism, we have two great wonders of grace with the ministration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the *“washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,”* (Titus 3:5) as we learned from our epistle lesson two weeks ago. This is important for us, for with this washing of Holy Baptism we are assured that the Holy Spirit has brought us into true faith with the washing away of our sins. We are new creatures. By one Spirit we were all baptized into **one** body.

This is the power and grace of the gospel. Jesus came into the world, and Jesus did fulfill the will of God for our salvation. He did **not** turn His back on the mission of salvation that was given to Him, the mission for which He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived a holy life, fulfilling all the righteous requirements of the law. Jesus did offer Himself as a sacrifice to God to pay the debt of sin we owed. He bore our sins in His own body as He was sorely abused, and crucified, and died.

In Jesus' resurrection God the Father declared the whole world justified, acknowledging Jesus' death on the cross as the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It is with this message of redeeming grace that Jesus healed the broken hearted and declared liberty to the captives of sin, death, and hell. We are **saved** from sin, death, and the devil!

This truth does not distinguish between rich and poor, between Jew and Gentile, between male and female. The same power of the Holy Spirit has brought us all into one body, **the Holy Christian Church**. The Holy Spirit has called us to faith and placed us in the body of Christ as He willed. So, this is not only a calling to being one in Christ through faith in Jesus; it is also a calling to **purpose**.

Then it becomes a matter of

II. Knowing our Role and Function within the Body of Christ.

Again, remember that Paul is using the illustration of a human body to help us understand the makeup of the Church, the body of Christ. So, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul wrote:

“For in fact the body is not one member but many.

¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

*¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body **just as He pleased**. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be?” (v.14-19)*

Paul is addressing the human tendency to leave things to others to get done. When individual members of the church see others as being the important ones, the ones who run everything anyway, then one might think its ok to let those others do it, and *“I’ll just, you know, come for what I need, when I feel like it.”* Excuse me, but just as it doesn’t work that way with your body, so it doesn’t work that way with the church. Just because your ear is not an eye doesn’t mean it stops being part of the body. Just because your foot is not one of your hands doesn’t mean it isn’t part of your body.

When God made you, and you are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14) you were made with a large variety of different parts that make up your body, each with its own important function. When one is injured or loses function, the whole body suffers the loss.

Next month we will be watching the winter Olympics. We will absolutely marvel at what these people can do in their respective sports. They train their whole body and discipline each part to function at its best in order to compete. A week or so after that the Paralympics will be held when people who are specially challenged with weakened or missing limbs, or traumatic brain injury will be competing in their games. That is amazing as well, in some ways even more amazing. They are separated into different Olympics because it wouldn't be fair to have the athletes with full function competing against those who are disabled.

At our best we are weak and must depend on the power of God to bless our efforts to achieve anything positive, but when various parts of the body just don't participate then the whole body is affected and functions poorly. Remember that the Apostle Paul was taking this general truth about the Christian Church and applying it to an individual congregation. It needed to be understood that each and every individual was placed in the congregation by the Holy Spirit, each with his or her own purpose and function.

It is equally important for the engaged members to recognize this truth as it is for the less engaged members. One dare not think, “Ah, we don't really need this or that individual.” *“But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”* (v. 20-21)

There is no room for anyone thinking we can get along just fine without this or that individual, any more than one should think the church can get along just fine without **me** being fully engaged. That isn't the Lord's plan or design. It hinders the proper function of the Church and of the individual congregation. Every individual is important and ought not be forgotten.

If you stub your toe, you say OUCH! You don't think, oh, it's just my toe. Rather, you think MY TOE really hurts! as you hop around on one foot until the pain subsides. And so, we ought to care for and about one another. Our text lays it out with these words: "*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*"²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*" (v. 26-27)

We need to care for one another, and sympathize with one another, and encourage one another, and endeavor to be fully engaged in the function of the body with the gifts and abilities the Holy Spirit has given us. This is all about **our purpose** in this world of **advancing the gospel**, of making disciples of all nations. It starts right here in the local congregation, right here in St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

The Apostle Paul used this same illustration in his epistle to the Christians in Rome writing to them: "*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,*"⁵ *so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*"⁶ *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;*⁷ *or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;*⁸ *he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

(Romans 12:4-8)

Certainly, it is the Spirit's intent that we apply these same words to our own congregation. We are one body, and individually members of one another. We belong together and we need to function together. We are individuals with a great many different gifts, so let's **use them** in proportion to our faith. Let's use them to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and the benefit of our fellow members and fellow man. Whether it is preaching or teaching or fixing or cleaning, or leading or giving or showing mercy and kindness to those who are hurting, let us do it all with cheerfulness. Let us "*serve the Lord with gladness.*" (Psalm 100:2)

Knowing your place in the body of Christ begins with knowing Christ. We are His members; He is our Head. “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10:45) He did not turn away from the suffering that lay before Him. He didn’t say, “I don’t need this,” or “I’ve got better things to do.” He served, and He saved you and me from sin and death. By the Spirit’s grace in Baptism, we were brought into this body of Christ, and endowed with gifts and abilities that we each might be a blessing to the body. As we function in the body it is to the praise and glory of Jesus Christ, whose is our Head.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)