

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a (EHV)

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we all were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free people, and we were all caused to drink one Spirit. ¹⁴ Furthermore, the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body," it does not on that account cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ If the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body," it does not on that account 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 now God has arranged the members in the body, each and every one of them, as he desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But as it is, there are many members, yet one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need for you," or again the head to the feet, "I have no need for you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are much more necessary. ²³ As for the parts of the body we consider less honorable, these we provide with more honor. We treat our unpresentable parts with more modesty,

²⁴ whereas our presentable parts have no such need. But God put the body together in a way that gave more honor to the parts that lack it. ²⁵ He did it so that there might not be any division in the body, but that the members might all have the same concern for one another. ²⁶ So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷ You are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it. ²⁸ And God appointed in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then miracles, healing gifts, helpful acts, leadership abilities, kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all miracle workers?

³⁰ Do all have healing gifts? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But eagerly seek the greater gifts.

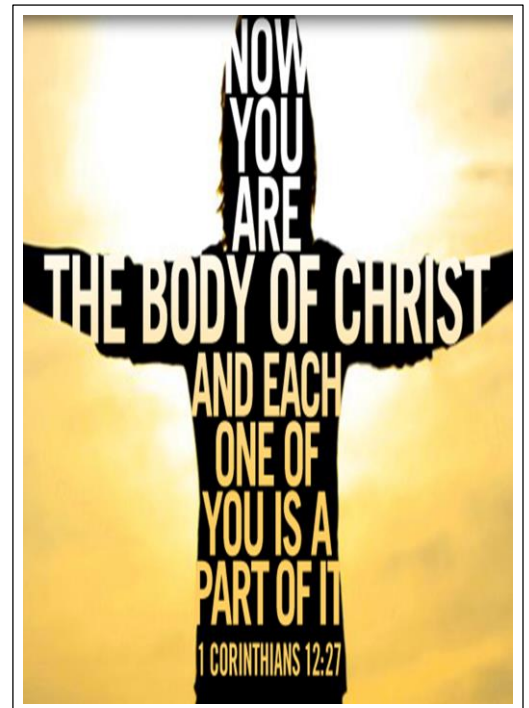
Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that, even though we're all individuals with different gifts, we may truly be one as you've made us one in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Every now and again a film is released which tells the story of a misfit group of people coming together to achieve something special, such as *Bad News Bears*, *The Mighty Ducks*, *A League of their Own*, *Remember the Titans*, or *Cool Runnings*. Some of the stories are based on actual events and some are fictional as they tell their oddballs to champions story in funny, heart-warming, or stirring ways.

The stories usually tell us how their different personalities, backgrounds, and skills create friction within the group, resulting in fights and arguments with each other. This further adds to their losses on the field. They're not working together very well, and the coach struggles to create cohesion among them.

Eventually the team comes together and not only has success on the field, but the individual members create strong bonds with each other. They no longer compete against each other but now compete alongside each other, supporting each other's strengths and weaknesses.

While the church isn't a team like those movies, God, in his infinite wisdom, has gathered a group of diverse and assorted individuals like you and me, with all our competing desires, fears, prides, selfishness, limitations, backgrounds, experiences, and tastes, into one community called the 'Church'.



This didn't happen because we all chose to be here with this particular group of people in this particular place, but because it was God's choice. God chose each of you and God also chose me. God gathered us together, whether we like it or not.

But instead of being compared to a sports team with various talents, short-comings, and potential, Paul says we've been gathered together into one body, the body of Christ.

Therefore, where a team of individuals might be able to work together (but still not be called one person), a body can't be anything else than one body, no matter what each of our talents, short-comings or potential may be.

In this way Paul isn't describing something we *become* through our efforts or responses to any pep talks by the local pastor, but something we *are*.

You see, you weren't baptised into a team or a community, but you've been baptised into the body of Christ. You're not optional extras hanging off Jesus in odd places to come and go as you please, but each of you is an essential and valued part of his body.

Therefore, no matter what you think of each other, and no matter what you think of yourselves, each of you belong to Jesus and have received the Holy Spirit.

But St Paul recognizes some of the human problems we have as members of the body of Christ.

You see, despite the fact we're all members of the body of Christ, and despite the fact we need the support and encouragement of each other so we may remain as one in his body, we may be tempted to either reject being part of the body or reject other members of the body.

To illustrate his point, St Paul offers the ludicrous example where a foot doesn't want to belong to the body because he or she isn't a hand. Another ridiculous example is an ear doesn't want to belong to the body because he or she isn't an eye.

Even though both the ear and the foot serve as important members of the body (one to listen carefully and the other to support the body and help it move), they're jealous of other members of the body who have different functions. Since every body part is necessary, the body simply wouldn't function very well if the whole body were a hand or an eye.

So, it seems some people want to leave the body of Christ – not because they feel superior to others, but because they feel *inferior*. They're jealous or resentful of others who might have certain gifts or special tasks, and so they feel they have no place within the body and wish to leave it.

Since it's God's will that he chose to join each of you to his Son, and that he blessed each of you with certain gifts and others with different gifts, to want to leave his body because you feel less important or useful or valuable, or because you can't do what others get to do, is to rebel against God's will.

Since God, in his infinite wisdom, chose to include each of you into the body of Christ, you're all equally important and valuable, no matter what your function or spiritual gifting may be. He's gathered you into Christ; not so you may serve yourselves, but to serve the will of God through your love and service toward each other.

In this way, you may consider a listening ear or word of encouragement by a frail elderly person to another struggling member of Christ may be just as valuable as someone able to play music or serve on a church council or a pastor who preaches a sermon.

St Paul also gives another preposterous illustration showing the opposite trouble. He tells of body parts

rejecting other parts. In this case the eye says he doesn't need the hand, or that the head doesn't need the feet.

Here, the issue isn't about feeling *inferior* to other members of the body but feeling *superior*.

You see, even though you all have your favourites or feel more comfortable with some people than others, none of you have the right or permission to make anyone else in the body of Christ feel inferior, unwanted, unloved or that they don't belong here. If God wants them to be part of the body, who are you to say they shouldn't be here?

In fact, St Paul indicates those members of the body who seem weaker, annoying, less honourable, or even embarrassing to you, are still indispensable and should be treated with extra care, patience, and compassion for the sake of the whole body.

Therefore, feelings or practices of either *inferiority* or *superiority* have no place in the body of Christ.

Each of you, individually and corporately, are the body of Christ. Your particular function, ability, age, background, gender, or enthusiasm doesn't change this fact. Each of you are dearly loved, cherished, precious, valuable, and essential members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church who have been gathered to serve together as the body of Christ here in this congregation.

Unlike the teams in those movies mentioned earlier, you don't need to learn how to get along and care for each other so you can win games or hearts or souls. You don't *become* the body of Christ by trying harder. You *are* the body of Christ and each of you have a particular function and purpose to keep on doing what the Holy Spirit has anointed the body of Jesus to do: to preach the good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for those who are imprisoned, give sight to the blind, release those who are oppressed, and announce freedom from debts.

Here in the body of Christ, even if you're poor or feel like you have nothing to offer God and often struggle in your obedience, hear the good news that Jesus Christ was obedient to death and offered himself as an atonement for sin – for your sin and the sin of those around you.

Here in the body of Christ, even if you're bound by shame or guilt or chains of the past, hear the good news that you're forgiven and are no longer bound by your past sins. Your sins or faults or weakness or failures no longer define you. The blood of Jesus and his love for you now defines who you are and to whom you belong.

Here in the body of Christ you learn to see the truth – the truth about your sinful state and the truth about God's undeserving mercy toward you through his Son, Jesus. You hear the good news that Jesus is now your Light and our Salvation and you have nothing and no-one to fear.

Here in the body of Christ, even if you're broken in spirit, or body, or soul, hear the good news you've been released from the binding powers of Satan and death. You're promised Satan has been defeated and death has been swallowed up by Jesus' death and resurrection. You've been freed to live in God's eternal kingdom and no longer owe God anything but your honour, love, and trust. Through faith you believe you've been promised new bodies which won't wear out.

Here in the body of Christ you learn not to look up to others with jealousy or resentment, because that would hinder the work of the body of Christ. You also learn not to look down on others with embarrassment or arrogance, because that too would hinder the work of the body of Christ.

God, in his extravagant grace and mercy has gathered you and me into the body of Christ spiritually and physically through the waters of baptism. You and I are forgiven and washed clean by his blood. Jesus continues to provide all of us with his own body and blood to continue to cleanse and forgive and renew

us – spiritually and physically – in the Lord’s Supper. Because the Spirit rests on us as the body of Christ, we love and serve and forgive to set people free from sin.

Because this is who we are, we do this willingly; whether we’re a foot or a hand or an eye or an ear or a fingernail or an eyelash or a nose. We love and serve and forgive, because this is who we are – the body of Christ in this place.

And so may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds as you live in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
South Burnett Lutheran Parish
3rd Sunday after Epiphany
26th January 2025