

Sermon for Sunday February 23 2025 – 1 Cor 12:12-27

What does it mean to be the Church? What does it mean to be the Body of Christ in this time and in this place? That is the essential question before us today as we gather on Annual Meeting Sunday. How are we to live into this notion of St. Paul's, that we are all members of the Body of Christ?

But I must begin at the thought that often precedes that question, the one where many ask if they are indeed members of the body. It's a question because we often do not hear that we are vital to Christ's body, or we assume that only the professionals who've gone off to divinity school, or have prayed for most of their lives, are worthy of living for Jesus. That the rest of us do not matter, that we have little to offer, and even if we did have something to give, well, it wouldn't make much difference.

The Corinthian Church must have been saying the same thing because Paul goes off on a tear. This is so important theologically about what it means to be the Church that I want you to hear it again from the Message Bible.

"You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which *he* has the final say in everything.

Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not

beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

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 honour 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." (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Message Bible)

We are all vital to the work of God in our world. That's what the Church is about, of course, the *missio dei*, the work of God, in redeeming all of creation. It's not about our beautiful building, or the programs we run, or even our budget. Don't mishear me, because all of those things can be used to help equip us to play our vital roles in God's

work. But if they only bring us here on Sundays so we can be consumers of spirituality, if we take part at Zion only to see our friends, or because we always have, and we don't go out into the world and take part in God's mission work, then we are really just wasting our time. Zion is here in order to form us as disciples as we experience, learn about and worship the living God. We can then in turn go out to make disciples who proclaim the Good News of Christ.

Jesus tells us what his Good News is when he reads that ancient scroll from the prophet Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." That's the work Jesus did as he moved among the Jews who lived under the Roman Empire 2000 years ago. We now as Christ's body, all of us, must continue that work as we move among our fellow people who live under the oppressive culture of materialism. We are all vital to that work. From our children to our seniors, we all can share in spreading the love of Jesus Christ in this world and proclaim by word and deed the good news of God in Christ.

We should, each of us, engage in the mission of God and help Zion to further become a place that makes disciples and engages our world and is vital to our community. We need to focus on our desire to connect by deepening our relationships, grow in our understanding and love of the faith, and Serve God in mission to the world and to one another. Those are the marks of a disciple-forming congregation.

We are called to a team-based approach to our ministry. We can and should continue to equip our members to actively participate in God's mission. We can and should continue to provide opportunities to deepen our understanding of Jesus and our faith. We can and should continue reaching out in service to those in our own community who long for connection with others.

To do any of this, all of us must take part. You see, God equips us for ministry; God has already gifted us with the skills we need to take our place in that work. Some will do it

in quiet ways that we never know, the way they reach out to a co-worker or neighbour who is hurting. Some will take on new leadership roles here at Zion. Others will focus their attention on the plight of those who are homeless and are stuck due to the forces of this world. Some will help an elderly parishioner with her yard work or simply go over for a friendly visit. The work is great, the opportunities never-ending, and all of us, all of us, are needed to do that work.

None of us is insignificant to God's mission in the world. We are, as St. Paul said, members of Christ's body, every part dependent on every other part. We must never forget that. And we must join together to bring Christ's good news to our broken and healing world in this year ahead. May we do so with God's grace and favour. Amen.