

January 24, 2016  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Epiphany 3C  
The Body of Christ

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

We live in a country that is very diverse. We have people immigrating to our country from all over the world. The white, anglo-saxon is soon to become the minority in the United States. Even go into Grand Forks and you can see the diverse nature of the surrounding culture and the different ethnic groups around us. It's not the culture that is diverse. It's also this congregation. Now most of you come from the same family or two, but you are all diverse. We are not the same. You and I we know that.

That was the case also for the people in Corinth. They came from different backgrounds. They came from different religions. Some even worshipped multiple pagan gods. I'm sure the Corinthian Christian Congregation knew how diverse they were and that they were made up of many members. So St. Paul uses an analogy of the Body for the Corinthian Church. *"For the Body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not it any less part of the body."* If the foot could actually voluntarily give up its membership in the body...it would have no purpose...and ultimately would die. The foot is needed, just as much as the hand. Paul goes on *"And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body."* The ear, the funny looking thing on the side of your head cannot be jealous of the eye, who serves a great purpose. You see each member of the body works together. *"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."* God's reminding the Corinthian church that they each have a role to play. St. Paul even writes how God has arranged them, just the way he sees fit.

Even for us, as I started to say, we are different, men and women, young and old, different ideas, different talents, different abilities, different vocations. We each have a role to play in the Body of Christ. It's great...God has designed the Body for a purpose. Each body part has a specific role to play, which in its own way is remarkable.

Dear family of God. You are each a member of the Body of Christ. As St. Paul writes in our text: *"For just as the body is one and has many 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."* By your baptism you are joined to the body. The Apostles understood this. In the Early Church, there were 12 apostles that were doing most of the work of the Church. The Church was expanding quickly, they needed help so they picked members who would be responsible in the Body of Christ. <sup>2</sup> *And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up*

*preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.<sup>1</sup>* These seven deacons that were chosen were chosen to help with service of the widows. In fact, we could call them the first Elders of the church. You see some of you are great with fixing things, while others of you are great with numbers, and others of you have compassion, while still others hospitality. Today at Trinity we install our officers for the next year. These men and women have been chosen to serve you with their gifts and talents. They are needed in the Body of Christ.

As people serve together, sometimes we might think...I can't do that, I want to, so I guess I'm not needed. Or perhaps we think...I would love to do something...no one has ever asked...I guess I'm not needed. Or perhaps...I have all sorts of fresh ideas to share the Word of God with the people in the pews and the people in our community, but I get shot down every time...I guess I'm not needed. To those of you who have felt "not needed", know that Christ needs you, you are given purpose in the body of Christ. It doesn't matter your age, gender, or abilities. We are each members of the Body of Christ based upon your baptism.

Just as your body has many members...so does the Body of Christ. We are in this together. The church gathers together around one uniting factor...the Word of God and His Sacraments. You see whether you are male or female, young or old, slave or free...you are baptized into the Family of God. You see, just as the Corinthian people weren't different anymore, neither are you. You are united together in the body of Christ.

If you don't believe just as if the Corinthian Church didn't believe it, St. Paul takes this body analogy a step farther. *"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." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it..."* The Church in Corinth, the Believers in Corinth understood how important their body parts were. Yet, maybe you have said to another member of the body of Christ... "I don't need you" either by your words or actions. I've seen this happen in my years of ministry, but also in my years of growing up in the faith.

If you have been the one to say these words by your words or actions...know that God does forgive you. As he forgives you He also encourages you to have no division amongst the body of Christ.

For as Paul continues to write to the Church in Corinth... "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members have the same care for one another..." God calls each of you to care for the members of the Body...not some care for one, and more care for another...but the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ac 6:2-4). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

same care for everyone. For Paul goes on to write: *“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored; all rejoice together.”* He also writes to the Romans: *“Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.”*

As we think about the physical body and the body of Christ – let’s think about the following. I’m sure you’ve all had an injury, something that has hurt on your body before...maybe a broken bone and strain, sprain or tear, perhaps it’s an infection of some sort. When a part of your body hurts...your body compensates for the hurt, and your whole body suffers.

Dear Body of Christ, when one of you suffers we suffer together, when one of you weeps we weep together. When one of you suffers a death in the family. When one of you is diagnosed with cancer. When one of you loses a job. When one of you has any type of tragedy...we suffer and weep together. We are there to put our arms around you. It’s how we do things in the Body of Christ. Dear Body of Christ, when one of you is honored or rejoices over something grand. We all rejoice together. When one of you is engaged to be married, when one of you is married, when one of you excels in school, when one of you is on a championship team, when one of you finds out their expecting a child, when one of you gives birth to a child, when one of you has your child baptized, when one of you celebrates a birthday, anniversary or other joy in life...we celebrate and rejoice with you. It’s how we do things as the Body of Christ. We put our differences aside and let the unity in the Body take over.

As you belong to the body and as you suffer, weep, and rejoice together...you are not alone. The Church on earth is not alone. We have a head to the body. We have a head who is one of us...fully human. We have a head who when we suffers, suffers with us. We have a head who when we weep, weeps with us. We have a head when we rejoice, rejoices with us.

Dear Body of Christ, this Head of the Body doesn’t just suffer with you. He suffered for you. He suffered greatly for you. The Greek Word for “to suffer” – *paschei* literally means to experience harm or emotional pain. That’s exactly what Christ suffered for you. He suffered great physical violence...yet he also suffered emotionally with his friends betraying him and denying him. His own Father forsook him on the cross. He suffered immensely for you. As Christ suffered for you. He also was raised to glory for you. He rose so that you may rise one day as well. He rose so that one day you will live...live for eternity. What a promise that is! What a future hope that is!

In Christ, since He suffered for you, your sins are forgiven. In Christ, since He suffered for you, you will live! In Christ, you are members of the Body of Christ. In Christ, you are heirs of the kingdom. In Christ, you also suffer with him. <sup>17</sup>*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.* <sup>2</sup> We suffer that we too will be glorified.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ro 8:17). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Dear Body of Christ. You and I are different. You are different from the person sitting in the pew next to you, in front of you and behind. You are different from the person sitting in the front or in the back. You are different from the person sitting across the aisle from you. There is differences in the Body of Christ...praise be to God that we aren't all the same. What work would we get done? Even though we are different, God has joined us together in the Body of Christ through Baptism and the forgiveness of sins. We are united. Even though, we are different, we are united in the Body of Christ, a unity and confession that we profess when we kneel at the table together to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Dear Body of Christ, with Christ as our head we will be forever united, even as we have compassion on one another, suffer with each other and rejoice with each other. Thank God that we are members of the Body of Christ, even though we are each unique and different.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*