

New Beginning

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

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (Series C, 3rd Sunday in Epiphany) Ps.19

Luke 4:14-21

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink. All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

The human body is amazing. What do you think of your own body? At times we can be very critical of our own bodies and find it hard to be complimentary about the way we look. We think of ourselves as too fat, too skinny, too short, too tall, too lumpy and bumpy, too plain, our hair is too curly, too straight or there's not enough of it to be either straight or curly; we have bad eyesight, a bad back, stomach ulcers etc.

In spite of our criticisms of what our own bodies look like, there can be no doubt that the human body is amazing, the psalmist David said we are wonderfully made. It is complex with all of its various parts and internal organs, yet it is unified with unparalleled harmony and interrelatedness. It's a unit, unique, and beautiful .

The many and differing parts work together as we do simple every day things.

Take a simple thing like walking –

- the movement of the legs back and forward,
- the action of hips, knees and ankles as well as muscles and tendons,

- the feet and toes as they keep us upright as one leg is lifted off the ground and swung forward,
- the movement of our arms, and the parts of our brain and nervous system that not only make all these body parts work together but also give us a sense of balance as we take each step.

We take it all these for granted and complain a lot about what we think our bodies ought to be like, but in reality they are fantastic and wonderfully made. If ever in doubt, watch a gymnastics or ice-skating competition and watch the beauty and grace of the human body.

The apostle Paul was fully aware of the wonderful way God has made the human body and talks about this in his first letter to the Corinthians. But he wasn't interested in giving his audience or us a physiology or anatomy lesson. His chief interest is in the way the Holy Spirit has brought so many different people into the one holy, and apostolic church (the body of Christ).

Just as each part of the body is unique and different from any other yet work together as one body, likewise the church is made up of so many unique and different people yet is like a single body. Paul says,

"The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:12,13).

Paul is right when he points out that the church is strange mixture of all kinds of people. Just take a look at us here in this church this morning. Everyone is different, with different looks. With different personalities,

- different ages,
- different backgrounds,
- different jobs or professions,
- different upbringings culturally or otherwise,
- different hobbies, and tastes,

- different levels of spiritual maturity,
- and all the other things that mark one person different to the other.

On any given Sunday in this holy, and apostolic church, we might have disgruntled church hoppers, visitors from all over the country and even overseas, newcomers to town, new converts to Christ, the spiritually lost returning to God, long time members, babies and children.

You won't find too many other organisations that gather every week with such a mixture of people. How do we all fit together? How did so many different people get to be part of the one church? This question becomes even more puzzling when you think of the church as not just the group of people who meet here every Sunday, or members of the Lutheran Church, but people from every Christian denomination, from all parts of the world.

When Paul talks about the body of Christ referring to the church, he means not only the narrower meaning of the word "church" (the local congregation) but also the wider meaning that includes all Christians around the globe.

How do we all fit together? Paul was writing to the Corinthians. Now if there ever was a bunch of people who found it difficult to get along, it was the congregation at Corinth. There were all kinds of disagreements, some thinking they were better than the others because they have money, and their position in society, some feeling as if they had no place in the congregation. Much like any congregation today really –

- there are those whose leadership is resented,
- those who always seem to end doing everything,
- others who feel put down and inadequate when it came to doing anything in the church,
- those who feel no one talks to them or like them,
- others who are upset over what someone else has said or done,

- some who never say anything but harbour grudges and resentments,
- others who want change, and others who resent it,
- and those who like the pastor and those who don't.. the list can go on and on....

Paul was writing to a congregation much like this congregation or any other congregation. Because of the upsets caused by the differences in people Paul writes to the Corinthians and us, describing the togetherness that is characteristic of the true church.

He tells us that the church is like the human body. Even though the body is made up of different and diverse organs it all functions together as one body. When we were baptized, the Holy Spirit made us part of this one, holy , and apostolic church.

Someone pointed out that we are not just members of the church but "membranes" trying to get across the idea that all of us are connected together through Christ. We have been joined together in such a way that even though God has given each of us different gifts, some seemingly more important than others, others that are hidden, nevertheless all of us in God's eyes are equally "membranes" in his church.

Paul points out that God put the body together in such a way that one part looks after another, and that the whole body is affected when one part is hurt. If I hit my thumb with a hammer what happens?

Well actually, several things happen all at once. My brain registers pain, tears come to my eyes, I stick my thumb in my mouth taking it out every now and then to give it a shake, and I jump up and down while speaking in unknown language. (The nature of those words I won't repeat here). Every part me body react to the pain in me thumb.

A few years ago during a Special Olympics, nine young contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard

dash. At the sound of the starting gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the desire to run the race, to the finish and win.

All, that is, except one boy who stumbled. He tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and paused.

Then they all turned around and went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed the boy and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine of them linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for 10 solid minutes.

That's precisely what Paul was getting at. When one is hurt, all feel it and will provide the help, encouragement, support and guidance that are needed. Whether we are talking about someone who going through a crisis, marriage or relationship break up, depressed, hurting because of what others have done, a teenager who has dropped out of the church.

A single parent, a person who just needs to feel they are loved, someone who has lost someone close through death – the pain of these people affect us all as "membranes" together in the body of Christ. We are called to **"link arms and walk together"** as those disabled athletes helped and encouraged one another.

I think sometimes we forget who we are really, God's people. But too often we let our sinful nature take control and we behave like individuals, lone ranger – and forget that we are the people of God brought together in the church.

We forget that *"together we are part of the body of Christ"* and that in our own way all of us have something valuable to contribute to the life of the church – some people are the upfront type, others go about things quietly and unobtrusively.

We forget that as part of the body of Christ we care for each other, and work together using our differing abilities, talents, financial resources, and

personalities to do the work that God has given his church – namely to speak and do God’s Good News of salvation to people in every kind of situation.

We only need to look at the history of any congregation and you will see how often church members and forget who they are. When a congregation forgets who they are, usually the consequences is devastating.

Thank goodness that God isn’t as forgetful as we are. He never forgets the promise he made at our baptism that he will always be our loving God. The God who promise to meet our every need.

Ready to forgive us and renew the bond that we have in the body of Christ. His Spirit reminds us that we have been joined together as brothers and sisters and the Spirit is urging us today to look at how well we have worked for unity in the body of Christ.

St Ansgar’s Lutheran (Good Shepherd Lutheran) is a great church. It is not a great club. It is not a great social organization. It is not a great place of entertainment. It is a church -- and it is a great one, because together, we are the body of Christ. Even as small as we are.

Yes, there is always plenty of room for making the togetherness that we share a reality in the way we work together, care for one another, and share the Gospel of Christ. All of us are challenged to recognise that the differences between us all are God-given and not a cause for division and separation.

We should use those differences to be the church in the world, and be ministers to the needs of others in our own unique way. By the power of the Holy Spirit, together, we are the body of Christ, holy, and apostolic Church. Amen.

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