

Body Language

I Corinthians 12:12-21 & 26-27

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

January 24, 2016 – Third Sunday After The Epiphany



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. One of the problems Churches always seem to have – almost as part of their nature – is they never appear to be quite as well organized or as smooth running as everyone thinks they ought to be. It seems as if something or someone is always falling “through the cracks.” Things are done that shouldn’t be done. Things aren’t done that really should be done. And so the main complaint from many quarters is often that the Church is being “flown by the seat of its pants.” Part of the problem, I’m afraid, is that Churches today – and I’m sure our Church would *have* to be included among that number – Churches today are too much like the Church in Corinth. There are too many within the Church who by nature are individualists. They want to work independently and do their own thing – an admirable trait in most circumstances, but a trait that’s often counterproductive in Church work. There are those who try to acquire spiritual gifts God never intended them to have – or do things God never intended them to do. And then, there are those who feel inferior or worthless because their talents and skills seem less important – or because their contributions to the life of the Church are less notable than the contributions of others.

When it comes to joining together with others in reaching or accomplishing a specific goal, everybody – at least on the inside – would like to be, or dreams of being, the proverbial “star quarterback.” All of us – at least once in a while – would like to feel that we stand out from the crowd. But, as any employer or coach will tell you, it’s the multitude of people who do their tasks well – and often well behind the scenes – that make any kind of success possible. In our text this morning *this* is the principle St. Paul stresses.

In last week’s Epistle reading it was noted how each member within a Christian congregation has been blessed by God with a spiritual gift of one sort or another. And there Paul talked about how one gift ought not be elevated over another. He spoke about how *each of us* should use our gifts and talents for the benefit of others – but he never really said how that should be accomplished. That’s what today’s text is all about. Using the illustration of the human body, Paul shows us how each individual member of Christ’s Church ought to use their divinely ordained and bestowed gifts so that the Church – the “Body of Christ” as Paul so beautifully calls it – might function as God intended.

The first thing we see in this text is that Christ is the Body which Paul says we are a part of – a fact often overlooked. We don’t have much trouble seeing ourselves as members of an organization called “Trinity Lutheran Church,” but we do have a little more trouble seeing ourselves as an *actual* part of our Lord’s Body. But, that description is exactly how God wants you to see yourself in relationship to Him. As a Christian, you are, in fact, an *actual* part of Jesus Christ’s Body on earth. What new dimensions that realization ought bring about in our individual – and congregational – life! Imagine the kinds of changes it ought to make in our life together as a Church when you realize what it means that you are part of Christ’s Body!

Let’s look at the imagery in the picture of “the Body of Christ.” What do you see? Perhaps a Church building – a particular group of people – a larger group of people – a sea of people too large to recognize by name? Or maybe, you actually see the physical body of Jesus. I’d like to focus on *that* picture for just a moment, for in the actual Body of our Lord is where something very important is taking place. It was *through the Body* of our Lord Jesus Christ that God *once and for all* settled His differences with mankind regarding sin. It was *with that Body* that Jesus Christ led the sinless life God required of us all. It was *on that Body* that God took out all his wrath for the sins of the *entire* world. It was *in that Body* that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and conquered the power of death. And, it is *by means of that Body* that you now receive the forgiveness of sins and can claim God as Father.

But, God hasn’t only enabled His differences with us to be settled through Christ’s Body, He has also taken care of the differences which exist between us as human beings – and especially fellow Christians. Through our participation in the Body of Christ – through faith – through Holy Baptism – and through the reception of our Lord’s true body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion – we, though many and diverse, find our identity and unity with one another. Because of our relationship to one another *through the Body of Christ* we are able to give up that kind of self serving individualism I spoke of before – with all it’s negative connotations. Through the power of Almighty God we have been made one with each other – even as we are also made to be individual parts of the body of Christ.

As individual parts of the body of Christ, we each have our own, very important function within His

Church. Although at times these functions might not seem all that important, consider if you will the consequences of such thinking. God has given *each of us* our own particular abilities to fill a specific need within His Church – a need He determined was necessary for the efficient functioning of His body here in this place. Some of our abilities – some of your abilities – may seem from our limited perspective to be more lowly – or more highly exalted – than others, but that isn't the picture God wants you to have. Look again at our text.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 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? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Looking at that text, we would have to conclude that the argument Paul uses is almost ridiculously simple. No matter how intelligent a person might be, that person's mind is useless without some way to communicate with the outside world. A brilliant man faces a monumental roadblock to success when he has no arms, legs, eyes, voice or hearing. And yet, that's *exactly* what we find in many Churches. There are people with ideas, but no one willing to carry them out. There are people willing to work, but no one willing to guide them. There are people with ideas, people to carry them out, yet no one willing to communicate between the two groups. Talents galore fill God's Church today, but the feelings and opinions of those individually talented people often cripple the very work they could be doing because they think just exactly as Paul has shown us in this text.

Friends, as members of Christ's Church on earth – as individual parts of His mystical Body – there should be within you no room for criticism, envy, feelings of superiority, inferiority or uselessness. As members of the

Body of Christ, you ought to have a deep seated vested interest in one another as fellow members of that body. Without one another we are all hopelessly crippled. We may move ahead, but very slowly. We may fight the battles, but more than likely we'll spend more time licking our wounds than fighting the enemy. We may put on a good show, but the reviews will be slow coming in.

You see, God wants us to care about one another – and I'm sure we do. God wants us to be involved with one another – and I know we are. But if you get the picture clear anchored in your mind as to what it means to be a real part of the Body of Christ, those important tasks of caring and sharing with and for one another will become such an important part of our life together that you won't have to consciously think about it to make it happen. As in a physical body – when the Body of Christ, His Church, is functioning properly – when one part is afflicted all the others will be afflicted and seek a remedy for their common affliction. When one part is lifted up and feeling good, the rest of the body will share in that feeling. All the members of the Body of Christ are designed to function as one Body working together under God. It moves forward as one body under the direction of the Lord. It strives for the same goals – seeks the same fulfillment – and serves the same Lord in oneness of purpose and singleness of mind. Working together, the body accomplishes the goals God has given it.

In the heat of the Revolutionary War, Benjamin Franklin was credited with saying: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." By virtue of our calling as Christians – as individual members of the Body of Christ – you *each* have an important part to play in the working of Christ's Church. The body of Christ is no place for individualists or hangers on. But, by hanging together – by exercising your gifts to the fullest for the common good of all – the Body of Christ here in Kearney *will* flourish – to the benefit of its members – but more importantly – to the glory of its Lord for the building up of His kingdom. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.