

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, Wash.  
November 22, 2009**

**Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts, Part 3**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

**We Are the Body of Christ!**

- 1. All the parts need to function**
- 2. All the parts need to function together**

**Hymns: 454 – 566**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

**1 Corinthians 12:12-27 –**

***The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.***

***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. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.***

***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!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated***

***with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.***

***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.***

A few years ago I saw a movie called "Castaway." The main character was played by Tom Hanks. The storyline went something like this: Tom Hanks' character was the manager of a package delivery company, which delivered packages all over the world. He happened to be on a plane that was carrying packages overseas when it crash landed in the Pacific Ocean during a storm. Miraculously, he was the only one to survive that crash, and he ended up on a deserted island.

A large part of the movie dealt with his life there. What did he do while on the island? He tried to dream up ways to get back to civilization. He kept his eyes open for boats and planes. He dreamed of ways to try to sail a raft to a main shipping route and be saved. He was so lonely for companionship that he made a best friend in a volleyball that was in one of the packages that floated ashore. He called him "Wilson." It was rather sad! Eventually he did build a raft and he made it back to civilization.

A lesson in that movie is that we are social creatures by nature. We need others. We need companionship, love and friendship. As we consider this third text in our sermon series called "**Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts**," we see that God's Church is like that too. He does not have Lone

Rangers as members. Instead, the Church is the Body of Christ and functions as a unit. Let's consider the theme, "**We are the Body of Christ**":

- 1. All the parts are vitally needed**
- 2. All the parts need to work together**

**1** – The verses that introduce this "body" concept are verses 12 and 13: "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*"

There are many different parts of the human body, some of which have no similarities:

- Your teeth are very different from your bicep.
- Your thigh bone is very different from your brain matter.
- Your thumb is very different from your carotid artery

Yet they work together in the same body. In the same way, the Holy Spirit had taken very different people in Corinth and made them one body. There were people who had a Jewish background. Some had a Greek background. Some were even slaves and some were free men. Some were wealthy; some were not. Yet they all had the same faith. And they all were in the same body to function together.

In the same way at our church we have people who are of different backgrounds who have been put into this body by the Holy Spirit. West Coast

natives, Midwest transplants, Caucasian, Koreans, and African Americans; yet the same faith and the same baptism, the same knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Savior, the same purpose as a body in this world, and the same mission to spread the news that Jesus is the only Savior and way to heaven.

That's why we call our church organization a "synod," meaning "walking together." That's why when the Nicene Creed was written centuries ago, which we will confess later today, the writers used the word "we" in starting the different parts. Different people, yet one in the Body of Christ!

The common thread that unites us all are two facts: First, that we are damnable sinners who were on a path to destruction because of our sinful condition. Yet God loved us enough to send his Son as our Savior to die on the cross and take our sins away. We are walking toward heaven – Together!

Paul tells us that it is important that the parts of this united body should be functioning: "*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. If they were all one part, where would the body be?*" Paul compares this concept to a foot saying that they're not as key a part of the body, or as beautiful, as a hand. But the foot should not think this

way! It is a vital part and needs to do its part.

Can you imagine parts of your body saying that? Can you imagine:

- *One tooth of yours becoming infected and not functioning as it should?*
- *One ear not working?*
- *Just one organ not functioning? Which one would you choose?*

Would you be hurting? Slowed down? Of course! It is not good for the body to act like this, no matter what the part is.

This means that in the Body of Christ (his Church), no parts should be saying:

- *“I don’t matter.”*
- *“I’m not as vital as other parts of this body.”*
- *“Someone else can do what I could do around here.”*
- *“I tried to serve the church a few years ago and things didn’t turn out like I thought they should, so I’m done serving.”*
- *“I worked hard on the building project years ago, so I’m done serving.”*

The body of Christ will not prosper with this attitude, for all parts are needed to function.

Remember the spiritual gifts we identified in last week’s sermon? We listed many different parts that are needed in our body here to function well! Can you see how we would suffer if you or someone else:

- Has musical talents that they do not use among us?
- Has artistic talent that they do not use?
- Has skill or interest in managing our money and doesn’t use it?

- Loves working with little kids and doesn’t use this?
- Has great ideas for outreach and doesn’t suggest them?
- Has abilities to lead a regular Adult Bible Class here but doesn’t want to?
- Could be a wonderful helper with our youth work but does not do it?
- Is in a position to give generously to the Lord’s work in our church but does not?
- Is wonderful at being an “encourager,” but never encourages?
- Is a close, constant pray-er, but does not pray for our church and members?
- Is great at being a greeter and welcomer for new faces at our worship services and doesn’t do it?
- Loves carpentry, repair work, or painting, but does not use their gifts for their congregation
- Can clean or cook, but never puts these to use in their church?

We would limp along! The body would not function well if parts don’t function.

Not only is this true, but it really is a sin to neglect any use of gifts you have to offer. May God forgive us for neglecting to function in the body of Christ, and **may we all see how vitally important we all are!**

**2** – Paul goes on to teach us one other lesson about the body. To illustrate this second lesson, I remember a lady from years ago who developed a problem. One day she developed double vision. Her eyes would not function together. They were both functioning, but not in harmony. How irritating. How unproductive. The body not

only needs to be working, it needs to be working together!

That's what Paul also tells us today: *"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!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor."* In other words, one part can't feel that it is better than others and not work with them! It does not work this way!

What if your heart got a high opinion of itself and said, "I don't need these other parts! I don't need these ribs or these lungs!" But if you think about it, those ribs are protectors of the heart. The heart, after all, is a very delicate part, even though it may think it is "better." It will be crushed without the ribs! And the lungs bring the heart the oxygen it needs to live! It can't live without the lungs! It can't even live without the feet who will walk to the table to feed the body so it is nourished.

How true this is of God's Church. One member or part can't say it is better than another. Someone who works in a classroom of our school can't say to the custodian, "I'm superior to you and don't need you!" Our principal would never say to the office workers, "I don't need you." He knows better!

Also, parts with less visible roles can't despise the parts with more visible roles. Those ribs can't say to the heart, "I want to be the heart, so I'm not going to do my function and protect you" because if they don't, no blood will be coming through the veins to nourish the ribs and they'll die! It would be just as foolish for the office workers to be jealous because they're not a

principal and not do their job well. If the school is gone, they won't have a job.

When cooperation is taking place, great things happen. Think about some of the great things that the human body can do if it is cooperating well and well trained! It can:

- Play a piano concerto that will leave the listeners amazed and inspired. Think about all the parts of the body that are needed to play a piano, from the eyes, to the brain, to the nerves, to the bones and muscles, to even the feet!
- Go in for a slam dunk. Again, think of all the parts working together as a basketball player sprints and dribbles and leaps to dunk the ball!
- Cook a great meal. It takes cooperation and timing to plan and cook Sunday dinner so that all the parts are done and hot and delicious to eat!

However, the devil can certainly get into a church and create disharmony:

- He can cause past grudges to fester, so people don't want to serve in harmony in their church.
- He can tempt someone to say, "I don't like that decision that was made five years ago, so I'm not going to function in harmony with that person who was the church president at that time."
- He can lead someone to think, "I don't like how that situation was handled eight years ago, so I'm not going to serve in harmony with those people who were involved."

- How unfortunate it would be for someone to say, “I’m just a school supporter,” and for someone else to say, “I’m a church supporter,” and feel that they’re not on the same team.
- Malicious gossip about other members can occur.

**May God forgive us for the times we have not worked in harmony, and give us a spirit that cooperates in Christian love!**

Finally, we’re told by the Apostle Paul how we feel about our body as we do this: *“The parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”* We have strong feelings for our united body! He says we have “equal concern” for each other. This actually is a Greek word which usually has a bad connotation of “worrying.” Paul says, in essence, that it is good to worry about each other and have Christian concern for the other parts! And he tells us that when a part is honored, everybody rejoices. We weep with those who weep, and we rejoice with those who are honored.

As we close our sermon series today, it’s good for us to ask two questions:

1. **How have we been doing at this as a church?** How has our body been functioning? Usually when the body could be doing better, two things happen to it as a church. Either the church’s ministry will suffer in some way, or the church will plateau. After all, so many active people can only do so much.
2. **How are you doing in your part?** Are you an active member of the body, or

are you a rugged individualist who happens to be a member of a church?

May our Lord help us! May he forgive us for any sins of the past when we have either neglected our gifts, or not been cooperative in our actions here. May he help us identify and use whatever gifts we might have in his body. And as our members use them, may God be glorified in it! Amen.