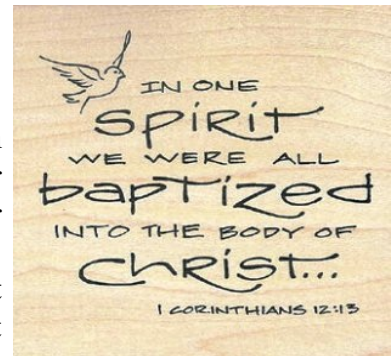


The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

¹²The 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. ¹³For 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. ¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If 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. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷If 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? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while 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, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But eagerly desire the greater gifts.



Theme: *One in Christ*

Last year I was invited to write an article for a mission journal, which is published by members of the faculty at our St. Louis seminary. It was published in the November issue of *Missio Apostolica*. The title of my article is, “Cross Cultural Missions Is Building the Body of Christ.” I recount our experience of cross cultural missions at Benediction and what I have learned from this experience. The main point of my article are these sentences, **“Here is the crux of the matter. Missions is not just sharing the Gospel. It is sharing the Gospel with other people, so that they will become one with us in Christ.”** I write a little further in the paper, **“As we unite with people who are far different from us, it shows what is really critical to our faith, and that is the blessed Gospel that Jesus Christ is our Savior. It is a treasure when we have that bond in Christ with people who are very different from us. It is a gift of God. It is what missions is all about.”**¹ Our text today is one of those classic texts, which emphasizes our unity in Christ as Christians, while also emphasizing our diversity in gifts.

¹http://lsfmissiology.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/MA%2011-12%20Online_with%20hyperlinks.pdf

I. As Christians we are one in Christ.

Christians are very different people. We see that right here in this church. On the 3rd Sunday of the month, we have services in 4 different languages. When I have filled in for Pastor Gui, I really have to shift gears between the German and the French African services. We like different foods. How many of you like tripe mixed in with your ground beef or eat Fufu? Even within our service we have a lot of different kinds of people. There are some words that have an entirely new meaning for our young people, than they did for our older members. We have different tastes in music and fashion. We even have a differences in politics. There are some Republicans and some Democrats, even within our own congregation. We are very different.

Yet, we are one in Christ. Paul writes, *“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.”* When we were baptized, the Holy Spirit made us a part of the body of Christ. We were given one Spirit. We have one God and Father. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Last Monday our nation celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King Day. His “I Have a Dream” speech is one of the greatest speeches in the history of our nation. He longed for justice, unity and peace among us as Americans no matter what the color of our skin may be. That’s a great dream, and something that we as a nation should strive for. However the peace and unity that bind us as Christians is even greater than that which bind us as a nation. It doesn’t matter how we look or talk, what ethnic background we have. We are all one in Christ. If we don’t like that now, we will be very upset in heaven. In Revelation 7 there are people from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before God’s throne and celebrating. In the Creed we confess that there is one Holy Christian Church. Our unity in Christ is even something that cuts across denominational lines. Each denomination is not a church. They are confessions within the church. Sadly there are disagreements in doctrine within the church, and every effort should be made to scripturally resolve these differences. However even though Christians often look very divided on the outside, in reality there is a unity among Christians that nothing can separate because we have all been given the same Spirit. Through faith in Jesus Christ, each one of you is a part of that Holy Christian Church. God’s Spirit has made you one with every other Christian in this world and with every Christian who is now in heaven. You are a part of the most wonderful fellowship there is.

As a congregation we are a picture of the body of Christ. We are all different, but we are one in Christ. We are not like 100 people who happened to be at a store at any given time. There is a bond between us. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. When one of us hurts, we all hurt. When one of us rejoices, we all rejoice. When one of us goes astray, we all are concerned. When one of us repents and returns to the fold, we all rejoice with the angels in heaven. There is a bond between us which is greater than any other organization that you belong to. We are one in Christ. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. What bond could be greater than that? The best part is that we are part of a fellowship that will last for all of eternity.

II. We also have a diversity of gifts.

God has given each one of us gifts to build up the body. We all have our own personalities and quirks. We all have different tastes. Some of those differences reflect our sinful nature, which we have to repent of and try to reign in. He has also given us different talents and gifts. Some examples

in the Bible show us just how varied those gifts are. Bezal and Oholiab were endowed with the gift of carpentry to make all the furnishings for the tabernacle. (Ex 31:1-11). Lydia was given the gift of hospitality and invited Paul and his companions to stay at her home. (Acts 16:14). The Macedonians were given the gift of generosity despite their own poverty. (2 Cor. 8) Then there were great preachers of the word like Peter and Paul. Some believers like Daniel were given great courage and wisdom. There is a wide variety of gifts that God had given to His people in the Bible, and there is a wide variety of gifts that He gives to us too.

Every gift is important. Paul wants to address two false perceptions in our text. The first is in verses 14-19, that I am not very important. He writes, *“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?”* There are a lot of people who feel that they are not very important in the church. Let me assure you that none of you is unimportant. It is often the people who seem to be the least important who do some of the greatest works. He often uses children to get their parents back to church. You would not believe how many times I have heard nursing home staff remark that they can’t believe that someone with Alzheimer’s, who can’t even remember their children, can still remember the Lord’s Prayer. Paul assures us here that God has arranged the body the way He wants it to be. He has given you the gifts and tasks that you have. You are an important part in the body of Christ. Each one of you is an important part of this congregation.

The second thing that he warns us against is thinking that we can do it all ourselves. Paul writes in verse 21, *“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.’”* We live in a country that has been influenced by rugged individualism, ‘I can do it myself. I don’t need anyone else.’ But we need the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout our lives. We need their encouragement. We need to be with them in worship. We need their help and support. We need to laugh with people who have a good, clean sense of humor. Our Christian walk isn’t just with Jesus. It’s with Jesus and all His people. Sometimes they might annoy us, but in the end, they are all blessings in Christ. God uses them to build us up in our faith in God and love for each other, and He uses us to build their faith and love too.

We live in a very individualistic time when many people feel lonely. This text gives us a great comfort, that we are part of a community, and the closest fellowship there is, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God give our congregation His grace that we may express that unity, love, and peace for each other. Where we have not manifested that unity, love, and peace, may He bring us to repent and rejoice in His forgiveness. May He also give each of us the ability to use the unique gifts that He has given to us to build each other up in faith, hope, and love in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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