

You Are the Body

January 23, 2022

1st Corinthians 12: 12-31a

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The 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.”

²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

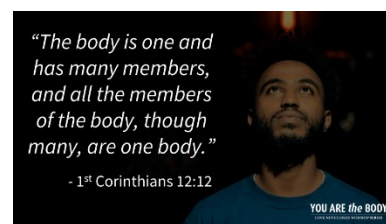
²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts.



Last week our text spoke of all the gifts going together to make up the whole, to bring unity. This week's text reminds us that each gift goes together to make up the whole. This is

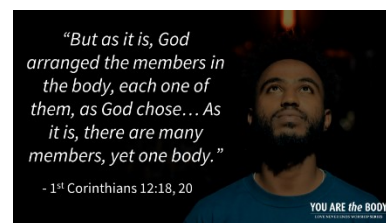
a subtle distinction, to be sure. Nonetheless the distinction is important. Put another way, last week we were saying that the whole matters, that unity matters, that the whole body of Christ matters. This week, we are saying that you matter to the whole and that your gifts matter to the unity of the body. Put yet another way, Paul would say to each of us: "you matter because the body won't be the body without you, without the gifts that you bring, without the person that you are." As we begin to explore how "You Are the Body", let us begin with a word of prayer...

As we continue in 1st Corinthians 12 this morning, we begin with verses 12-21. Please turn with me this passage. Here Paul begins by emphasizing the importance of both the individuals and of the body as a whole. The importance of community and unity is summed up well in verse 12: "*The body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.*" We are all made part of the body of Christ through baptism and by the indwelling of the same Holy Spirit.

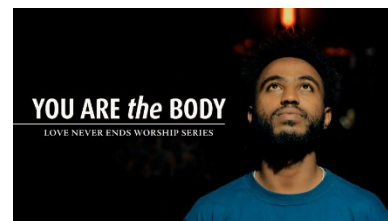


After reminding the Corinthian church and the church today that the body consists of many members, Paul goes on to give us some clear examples of how each part of the body matters – both in our physical body as well as in the body of Christ. In essence Paul writes that just because we’re not this part or that part, it does not mean that we are not connected to the body. Here Paul is telling us that diversity is necessary and good. In verse 17 Paul asks, *“If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?”* Imagine what it would be like to only be able to smell or to only be able to hear! In the same way, imagine if, for example, we only had scripture readers and no song singers. What would worship be like without any singing? Yes, we could worship without song. But how much less our worship would be! In the same way, imagine if all we did was sing. Worship would not be all it could be or all that God intends it to be if all we did was sing.

In verses 18 and 20 Paul returns to God as the designer of the body and the Spirit as the giver of gifts. In these verses the apostle writes, *“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose... As it is, there are many members, yet one body.”* God arranged the body as God intended it to be. The Spirit gave gifts as the Spirit saw fit, creating different roles or parts for each of us to play. These words remind us that we are all unique, yes. But more importantly they are reminding us that we each matter, that we each are an important part of the whole, and that we are who we are in the body of Christ because God designed us that way and because the Spirit gifted us that way.



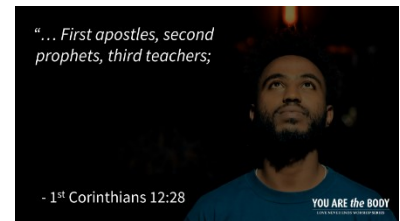
Continuing on in verses 22-26, we see how or why all parts of the body of Christ are essential to the whole. To all of us, Paul is saying, “You are the body.” Together, as a whole, you form the body of Christ. In these verses we are reminded that parts of our body that do not seem “strong” or the parts that appear less “honorable” or “respectful” receive special or extra care. First, the members that seem “weaker” are indispensable. Our brain, the center of our functioning, is a good example of this idea. A little clunk on the head and the physically strongest of us can be sidelined for a period.



Second, the parts that are “less honorable” are treated with modesty and respect. In the physical sense, frankly speaking, we treat our private parts with respect and modesty. The ways in which we love on and support one another during times of temptation and struggle and trial are good examples of how we treat or care for one another with modesty and respect. When another sins or is struggling with something, we do not bring it up during church or around the table during fellowship time. Private matters are handled with respect and modesty – maybe humility would be a better word in this illustration. A phone call or a note, a quiet moment when opportunity presents itself – these are the better way to offer support and encouragement and accountability. When someone is suffering, the body does not allow them to do this alone. As one body, we are called to *“have the same care for one another.”* Paul continues this call to love in verse 26, where he writes, *“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.”* This interconnectedness is the source of strength and comfort in times of difficulty and pain. This too is part of being the body together.

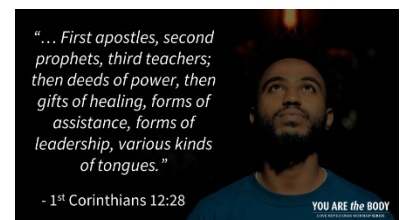
In the last section of our passage from 1st Corinthians 12, Paul turns to some of the specific roles that people play in the church. Before we delve into these roles, let me point out that the list is not entirely hierarchical for the church. Paul gives the first part of this list, recognizing the central roles for the development and edification of the church, and then gives a few more roles that were roughly equal to one another.

We find the list in verse 28: “...*First apostles, second prophets, third teachers.*” As the church began in the period after Jesus’ death and resurrection the first role needed was the apostles. Most of the disciples and other became



apostles – “a messenger sent forth”. The first apostles were people like Peter, James, John, Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Barnabas. The apostles were the founders of the churches in various communities. They took the good news of Jesus Christ and went out into the known world to spread the gospel. Next would come prophets, men and women who would speak into the vision of God for the church and for those who would follow Jesus. Then would come teachers, those who gave a practical voice to the living out of the faith in various contexts and situations.

The verse then continues, “*then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.*” As the church began to form and grow in



places, gifts of healing and deeds of power would encourage the people of faith and would give credence to the words being spoken. It should be noted that these two gifts were in the opposite order last Sunday, indicating for us today that one was not better than the other in Paul’s mind. Different means of supporting and leading the church would also be essential to continue the ministry of the gospel.

Lastly Paul identifies the various voices or tongues that would guide and move the church forward in both faith and mission. Here they are again listed last because this gift was causing the most friction and division in the church in Corinth. This section closes with a series of questions. These are rhetorical questions. Paul does not expect an answer. The questions – “*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?*” and so on – are asked to remind those in the church that we all have different gifts, that we all have different ways to be a contributing part of the body.



Because you have all been gifted, you are the body of Christ. To think about the ways that different people contribute to Grace and to help you think about ways that you could

possibly offer your gifts, consider your own answers to these questions:

Who are the unofficial greeters or hosts, those who make even first timers feel like they belong? Who are the ones that physically walk a newcomer into Fellowship Hall for cookies and coffee, sometimes even waiting outside the bathroom door so that they do not escape?

Who is always there to lend a hand when something needs done at church? Who is it that randomly shows up and scoops the snow off the lines in the parking lot so that we know where to park on a Sunday morning? Who was it I found kneeling outside the door that leads to the playground, replacing the GFCI receptacle that was broken?

Who comes along with the youth to the play or other outings, insuring enough adult supervision for a safe trip? Who are first ones to always sign up or to bring needed items for Vacation Bible School when the call goes out? Who is it that shows up unannounced with a plate of bars or with some homemade candy for the staff at church?

Who always helps meet the budget when things are tight or when something goes wrong with the HVAC system? Who wields a mean paintbrush or brings cookies for coffee hour? Who are the last ones out the door because they make sure that chairs are put back and that the lights are turned off?

Like Paul's list, this is just a partial list that recognizes the many, many acts of service that make Grace what it is. There are many who share their gifts in ways that even they might not have recognized unless we take a minute to consider all the ways that Grace UMC is the church. So... we did so by considering this short list of questions.

As another way to look at Paul's call to be the body, to use our gifts for the common good and to build the kingdom of God as the community of God, let us consider a team analogy. All good teams have different parts or players with various gifts. Each player fills a role based upon their giftedness. A community of faith with just leaders would not make a very good church. A baseball team mad up of only catchers would not make a very good baseball team, either. You need catchers on your team just as a church needs leaders. But the team also needs starting pitchers and infielders, outfielders and relievers. A church needs people to fill a variety of roles too. We all need to be willing to offer our gifts for the church to be at its best.

Here is an illustration of many of the ministries offered at and through Grace. Like Paul's list of spiritual gifts, this only represents some of the ministry here at Grace. Here at Grace



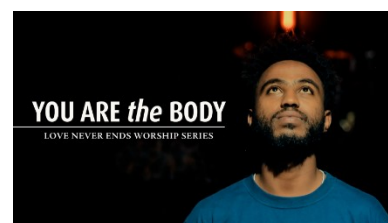
we offer programs for children, youth, and adults. We have teams that oversee the finances, properties, and staff of the church. We have outreach ministries that offer assistance to people in need. We have people that offer their gifts on Sunday mornings. And we also have people who support and give to these ministries. Some give financially, some give through their time. Each ministry has people with a variety of gifts. Any of these ministries would be less than it is if those involved were not willing to share their giftedness with Grace and our community.



As we begin to draw to a close, please turn with me to Luke 4: 14-30. This was the gospel reading for this week in the lectionary, so some of you might be familiar with this

passage already. In these verses, Jesus offers prophetic words of hope and celebration. He is back at home, in Nazareth. And as was his custom on the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue to teach. On that day the scroll from the prophet Isaiah was given to Jesus. On that day Jesus read these words: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* All are wonderful gifts that Jesus offered to those in need.

Reflecting upon these words, Jesus goes on, in verse 21, to proclaim: *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* At first, they are amazed at his teaching, at his knowledge. But as the story continues to unfold, the people of Jesus’ hometown become angry, they reject these words, and they reject Jesus. You see, the offense is found in the fact that Jesus says the good news is for everyone. Jesus dared to remind them that Elijah and then Elisha ministered to those who had faith – the widow at Zarephath and then to Naaman the Syrian – because none were found to be faithful in Israel. So too would Jesus and his followers minister to the Gentiles and to others outside the chosen people of God. The people from Jesus’ hometown were incensed because Jesus spoke words that they did not expect to hear, scandalous words about who would be included in God’s family. They did not like the plural “you” as Jesus expanded who he meant when he said, *“You are the body of Christ.”*



This too can happen with the gifts of the Spirit. When I decided to leave my teaching career after 23 years to enter vocational ministry, there were some who questioned, some who wondered. How could that guy become a pastor? To them, I was this certain person and probably always would be to some. Instead of never being more than the carpenter’s son, I’d never be more than the teacher or the coach. I share this as a way to encourage us to have open minds concerning the gifts of the Spirit. As we have talked about different gifts and as maybe some of you have explored the other lists of gifts found in the Bible, perhaps you have wondered if you had this gift or that gift. Some might have even wondered how you could use a gift that you’ve always known you had.

So first, have an open mind about how God might be at work in your own life and faith. The Spirit might be stirring in your spouse or in one of your church friends or in the life of someone in the congregation that you just sort of know. Second, when someone you least expect is led by the Spirit to use a gift that they have discovered or when they have come to see how a gift that they have could be used to build the kingdom of God, have an open mind there too. Trust that God is at work in them, that the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding them, and encourage them, support them, pray for them. Be a good Christian brother or sister.

Each and every one of us has been gifted by the Holy Spirit. Each and every one of us has been designed and created by God for a purpose in the kingdom. As you and I and others in the church begin to see how we can offer our gifts for the building of the kingdom of God, let us be generous – both in the offering of our gifts and in the ways that we see other people’s giftedness. We are all God’s creation, all God’s handiwork. We are all beloved and we are all a part of the family of God.

Just as *“there are many members, yet one body,”* let us each rejoice in our unique giftedness, seeking to help the body to better be the body that God has designed us to be. My friends, God not only wants us to see what the kingdom looks like but to *be* the kingdom as much as we can. In order to be the kingdom, we need to minister to one another and to the world. In order to minister, we need to use the gifts that the Spirit has blessed us with. May you and I be willing servants this week. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. During your time at Grace, how has God increasingly used your gifts to build the kingdom? If you struggled to answer this question, what gifts and talents do you have at work or school that might be usable at church?
- 2) *Pray*. As you maybe wrestle with contributing to the church or its ministries, please pray for guidance in how God might be wanting to use your gifts.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 4:31-37. How does this day of teaching on the Sabbath end differently? Why is it different? What is the impact for those there that day?