

01.27.19

Dallas Dodd Presbyterian Church

“We are the Body of Christ!”

Our New Testament passage is from the book of Corinthians, chapter 12 verses 12 through 31. I am reading from the Common English Bible, listen now for the word of the Lord:

**12** Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. **13** We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink.

**14** Certainly, the body isn't one part but many. **15** If the foot says, “I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand,” does that mean it's not part of the body? **16** If the ear says, “I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye,” does that mean it's not part of the body? **17** If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. **19** If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? **20** But as it is, there are many parts but one body. **21** So the eye can't say to the hand, “I don't need you,” or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, “I don't need you.” **22** Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. **23** The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. **24** The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor **25** so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. **26** If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.

**27** You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. **28** In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues. **29** All aren't apostles, are they? All aren't prophets, are they? All aren't teachers, are they? All don't perform miracles, do they? **30** All don't have gifts of healing, do they? All don't speak in different tongues, do they? All don't interpret, do they? **31** Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts. And I'm going to show you an even better way.

**((This is the Word of the Lord)) ((Thanks be to God))**

### **The Body of Christ**

You may have grown up hearing the phrase "The Body of Christ", I know I have used it many times in my sermons here. But, we kind of just expect people to understand and know what we mean by that phrase. Being the body of Christ implies that we are the ones doing Christ's work in the world, by extension, doing God's work. Christ, and therefore God no longer has a physical form walking around the Earth. Because of that, we must be the ones that are doing the work God needs us to be doing while we are here.

This will look different for every person. We have been told by Paul in this letter, that we are the ones who must be the body now. We can't just wait for the second coming or wait for others to do the footwork. We have to work with each other to build, maintain and nourish the body as if it were our own. Because while God is not physically on our Earth, we are all the feet, the hands, the eyes, the *body* that God has here. We can't simply ignore that call. If we do, or if we rely completely on everyone else to do God's work, we will not be participating in the Church as a whole. If we ignore it, how can we call ourselves one of God's children?

There is distinct importance to having a body. And there may be times that we don't quite love our body the way we are supposed to. I remember moving to Georgia from Kansas City, Missouri. I went to a doctor, just for a yearly physical, and he said

“well... you’re obviously on the heavier side...” I heard nothing else the entire appointment. That specific sentence cut so deep, I had no words. I got home from the doctor. I looked in the mirror, really looked. And I decided I was done not loving and caring for my body. I started eating healthier food. I started cooking for myself instead of eating out every meal. I started going to a kickboxing gym. And over time, I have begun to really love the body I have been given. This isn’t a story about losing weight. It’s a story about the fact that I made a clear choice that I wasn’t going to treat my body like trash anymore. If I made that choice for my own self, my own body, why wouldn’t I make that choice for God’s body?

In the last couple of months, I have been asked to practice mindfulness, which is simply taking stock and being aware of your body and what it is telling you. I want to suggest a mindfulness activity if you would join me. Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes, while taking deep breaths. Clear your mind, there is nothing else you have to be thinking about in this exact moment... Think about your body, start with your toes, and move up your legs, to your back, your neck and shoulders and finally end on your jaw, and your face. Are you holding tension anywhere, and can you release that tension? Is there any pain? What has your body done for you this week that you were appreciative of? How did it move you through your week? I want you to think about these things, and address each piece. I will be quiet for a moment...

Ok... open your eyes, nudge your neighbor if they have gone to sleep, and come back to the present. Do you feel refreshed? Do you feel like you’re a little more focused? It is important to spend time focusing on our bodies and how they work, and what they do for us. It is important because God is asking us to do the same thing for God’s body. We have to take stock and evaluate the body of Christ just like we do with our own.

## **We Belong to the Body**

We have been asked and called to belong to the Body of Christ. The body of God working in this world. We must take a moment to think through what this body has done

in the past week. What pain is it feeling? Is there tension? How can we help alleviate some of those problems?

If we all took a moment to focus on the things that the Body is feeling or that the Body is going through, do you think our world would improve? I believe it would. We all belong to this single body of Christ, and while it takes a special kind of leader to organize that many people, we can rest in the fact that we truly have a leader! We have a triune God leading us every single day. The Creator is orchestrating the Plan, the Redeemer leading us into action, and finally, the Sustainer is showing us the path.

Not only have we been called by God to join and be a part of this body, but that call means we belong. Each and every single person has been called to the Body for the greater good of the Church. If we only needed one or 2 people from each congregation, instead of each and every person, this letter to the church at Corinth wouldn't be nearly the same. Think about it- Paul would have written, "Make sure you pay attention in church. There is only so much you can do, so support your pastor as much as possible. Make sure you don't bring your friends, there are no more free seats in the pews. Also, make sure you stay quiet. The church leaders have a lot to do and don't have time to deal with whatever your questions are..." That doesn't sound the same, does it?

This sentiment is never written in our scripture. Instead, we are encouraged to work together, we are told that we all specifically have the need to belong and give our gifts to the Church. There is a reason when we give physical money each week, it is stated as our tithes and offerings. There is a place for the offering of your gifts to the church. We don't just need physical cash. We need you. We need your talents. We need your own special contributions to the Body of Christ. Because we truly can't do it without you.

### **Belonging Means Participating**

We each have been asked to be a part of this body, but you may still be skeptical of your specific spot in it. As our scripture says, a foot says it is not part of the body,

because it is not a hand. An ear says it is not because it is not an eye. But these things are still part of the body. No part can jump ship and vote themselves out. Neither can we.

We are not any less a part of the body just because someone else is a different part of the body. Imagine if this entire congregation was preachers. That would be a nightmare. If we were all playing the one piano, it would be impossible to hear anything. If we were all the Sunday school teacher a single Sunday, who would be there to hear a lesson?

God appointed us all to a different position in the Church, and therefore in the Body. As the scripture says, apostles, prophets, teachers, deeds of power, gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues... I know for a fact, I don't hold every one of these gifts. But I am sure each person in this room holds at least one of these gifts. I know this because we, as a community, wouldn't work otherwise. The community wouldn't function as the Body of Christ.

### **Being a Community**

I use the word, community, intentionally. The Body only works as a community. Otherwise, we would run into a very real problem of burnout. No one human can solve all the problems of the Body, and no one human can provide the solution to every problem of the Church. We are all needed.

If every person of the Body felt burned out or discouraged at the same time, nothing would ever get done for the Body. We are needed to support and love one another while all working toward the common good, and to better the Body of Christ. We must be a united, but diverse body as well. Like we've talked about, not everyone can be doing the same thing in the functions of our Church. Each and every one of us has something to bring to this table, and everyone has a seat at it. And each person brings a distinct and important gift to the table that binds us all together.

If we aren't willing to work within that community, I believe the Body of Christ won't work to the fullest extent it is meant to. No one in this Church is meant to go in

alone on this Body of Christ. No one is being asked to spend their entire life fixing all these problems without any help. And no one is expected to have every answer. If we were, it wouldn't be the Body. It would be the One-Person-Show of Christ. We are meant to be in community. We are meant to spend time working toward the Kin-dom of God together.

### **How the Church *Looks***

As we are called to participate and spend time working together in the Body of Christ, we must think about what the Church looks like. And not just Dallas Dodd Presbyterian Church. Not just any single church. We must think about what the larger, universal Church looks like. That is the full Body of Christ. It's not just us sitting in this room. As preparation for writing sermons, I always read a commentary series called Feasting on the Word. One of the articles for this passage was written by Karen Stokes, she says:

“This is a vision of church: not a building, but a body of people, caring for one another, sharing the work of God in the world. But lest this passage be heard as placing yet another burden on already overburdened people of faith, it is important to remind our hearers that this all is made possible by the gifts of the Spirit, who works in and through each of us. All of us who are part of the body belongs to Christ, and we depend on the Spirit, who is life.”

I think this passage is incredibly important because if we forget who feeds us, and who nurtures our growth as the Body, we won't get anywhere as the full Body of Christ. We need the Spirit to nourish us along the journey. We need, and we crave Christ to be our leader and show us the way to follow. And we ask God to show us the path we are being asked to walk down. Only with the help of our awesome, triune God, will we truly find the community and perfection of the Body of Christ.

So, one more time, I ask you close your eyes, sit comfortably... think through the Universal Church. Where is there tension being held? Where is there pain? Is it an old

pain we have grown accustomed to, or is it a new pain that we are shying away from? How has this body helped us through this week? What has it done for us that we haven't acknowledged? Where can we build and repair the bonds that have been hurt or broken?

If you would pray with me,

God,

You are above all and through all. You have called us to be your body in this world and to act in a way that seeks your plan and your path for our communities. We fall short of this call but we ask for your help in leading us down whatever path you need us to follow. Help us see your body as one that we can truly impact and help. Here we are God, to do your work in this world.

In your most holy name,

Amen