

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.

We are the body of Christ.

- I. As one body, we walk together united in faith.
- II. As many members, we walk together united in mission.

Dear members of the body of Christ,

The human body is amazing! One thing I remember from my trips to the doctor as a child is the posters hanging on the wall in the waiting room. There were several posters side by side which showed the different systems of the body. There was the muscular system with 630 bundles of cells and fibers contracting and relaxing to allow movement. The circulatory system showed the red blood cells carrying oxygen from the lungs to all the cells of the body while the white blood cells depicted as soldiers protected the body from infectious disease. Arteries and veins served as vessels carrying blood to and from the heart. And there was the digestive, the respiratory, the nervous and the skeletal systems. I could have spent hours looking at those posters.

It is fascinating to see how every bone, muscle, nerve, tissue and organ is made of exactly the right material and is placed exactly where it needs to be to serve the function for which it was designed. How could we not with the psalmist praise God because we “**are fearfully and wonderfully made!**” (Psalm 139:14) You have one amazing body that consists of many members. And you are a member of one amazing body.

In our sermon text this morning, Paul says, “**you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**” We are the body of Christ. As one body we walk together united in faith. As many members of one body, we walk together united in mission.

- I. As one body, we walk together united in faith

Sadly however, this unity doesn’t always exist, does it? This is evident from our text for today. The Christian church in Corinth was filled with many gifted individuals. Unfortunately

though, some were misusing those gifts. They started to rank people in various levels of importance according to their spiritual gifts.

As a result, some members became puffed up with sinful pride and looked down on everyone else. Others were left looking up felt inferior and unimportant, as though they had little or no value to offer the congregation. Ultimately, there was no unity... only cliques and factions.

Paul provides an illustration of the human body to help them understand what it means to be a Christian. It's as if Paul is hanging a poster of the human body on the wall and then says, "This is Christ." Then pointing to the hand he says, "Christian, this is you. See this finger, this fingernail... this is you. Corinthians, you know how important and necessary each and every member of your body is. It's the same way with the body of Christ. **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.** Every believer, man, woman and child is important and necessary to the body of Christ. Not because of what they have done, who they are, or they gifts they possess; but because of what God has done for them, because of who God has made them through Christ, and because of the gifts God has given them.

We need to be reminded of this as well. This unity doesn't always exist. This is evident from our own lives - in our relationship with God and with others. Like the Corinthians, we too are guilty of pride. It is pride that wants the lifelong Christian to believe he is more vital to the church than a member recently brought to faith. Sinful pride wants us to view ourselves as being superior and more important than others. It is jealousy and envy that lead us to feel inferior when our spiritual gifts seem to pale in comparison with others. When we feel we don't fit in, we may be lead to believe that there is little we can contribute to the body of believers. And if this is the case, then why go church at all. As a result, we separate ourselves from each other and from God. Ultimately, because of sin, there is no unity.

So what is powerful enough to unite us? What can take us sinful beings as we are, and change us and rid us of that selfish, prideful attitude?

One thing is certain. That change does not come from within. From within there comes only more pride, jealousy and envy. No, like all good things, this change can only come from God.

God had a plan that from beginning to end had nothing to do with us doing anything. This was the plan for our salvation. This plan was revealed to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when God gave them the promise of the Messiah. This plan was revealed to mankind in a manger in Bethlehem when God sent his one and only Son. God's plan was fulfilled when Jesus, the Lamb of God, though sinless, took our sin upon himself and suffered the punishment we deserved at Calvary.

God takes off of you and me what we can't have if we want to be in a right relationship with Him – our sin. God took my sins and yours and the sins of all and placed them on Jesus and let Him pay the penalty for them which is death, separation from God. Not only did God put all of our sins upon Jesus, He then credited the perfect life of Jesus to us, that is God has declared us not guilty. We believe this through faith.

Faith itself is a gift of God. Romans 10:17 tells us that "**faith comes from hearing the message**" of Christ. It is this faith in Christ Jesus that unites you to God and to all believers. When the gospel is spoken or preached, it works faith. The same gospel comes to us with the Word and water in Baptism.

Paul writes, "**we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body... (when) we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**" Baptism is not something we do but it is something God has done for us. In baptism, God offers and gives full forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In baptism, God adopts you into his family.

It isn't a question of whether you belong to the Church or not, you are the Church; you are the body of Christ. And it is God himself who has arranged the parts in the body, every one

of them, just as he wanted them to be. What comfort! When you feel like you are the one who doesn't belong, remember that God has made you, his redeemed child, who you are today.

II. As many members, we walk together united in mission.

As the body of Christ we are to carry out Christ's work. As we just heard the work of our salvation has already been accomplished, 100% - **"It is finished"**. So now the work of Christ; the work of the body of Christ, is to grow. That's what a body does, doesn't it? We grow in our faith and in our understanding of Scripture as we faithfully study God's Word. We grow together as a congregation when we support the Christian education of future teachers and pastors with our prayers and offerings. We grow as the body of Christ when we share God's Word with others.

As we do we can be thankful for each other's gifts. God has gifted each of us in our own way. Did God give you the gift of being a parent? Then raise your children to know Jesus that they can spread the truth. Did God give you the gift of craftsmanship? Then build facilities that allow Christians to have a place to gather around the truth. Did God give you the gift of love and friendship? Then build relationships with people so that they can see how the truth has changed your life. We recognize that every member here at Grace has been gifted by God in their own way.

We recognize and celebrate this morning that Grace Lutheran itself is a member of the larger body of Christ; the body we call the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We in the WELS enjoy a most special unity, unity of doctrine. We believe and confess the same thing: the holy truths found in Scripture. Together, as churches united by the faith we walk and work as the body of Christ; teaching his truth.

And as we walk together we share each in each others sufferings and joys. Paul says that when one part suffers, the whole body suffers. We see this everyday. Often right here at home. Parts of the body of Christ are unemployed, lonely, depressed, hated, and worried. When you, as a part of the body of Christ, suffer, take comfort and know that we suffer with you. We share each others pain.

And together we will praise our Heavenly Father, **"who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."** (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4)

While we share in the troubles and sorrows we face while walking on this earth; we also share in the joy of knowing that our sins are forgiven. This brings comfort when we succumb again and again to the sins of pride, jealousy and envy. We also share in the confidence we have in the resurrection the life to come; that is the gift of heaven. It is that gift that is always before our eyes as we walk together united in faith and united in mission. Amen.