

## **“The Body of Christ”**

January 27, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 12: 4-20, 25-27

When reading parts of New Testament like 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians and even 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus; we need to remember we are reading someone else’s mail. They are all letters supposedly written by Paul to different churches and individuals in the first century. Since that part of the world had no idea there was such a continent as North America, much less a place called Rochester in a state called Indiana in a country called the United States; the letter obviously wasn’t written to us. Besides that, since they are individual letters, we are only getting one side of a conversation. We don’t know what questions the churches have asked Paul in previous letters or know what reports Paul was getting about the congregations. All we can do is try and make educated guesses about what questions, situations and challenges the letters are addressing.

From gathering up all the information we have, it seems like the church in Corinth was thriving but was having a few power struggles. Different groups and individuals had different ideas on how the congregation’s worship should be organized, who’s teachings it should follow, and what should be its foundational mission and identity. (Remember the Bible had not been written yet.) The congregation was trying to define truth by what they remembered from Paul and Apollos and other teachers and guest speakers that had come through town. In the section of the letter which includes the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, Paul seems to be addressing a sense of superiority that some church members were feeling over others. At our baptism, the Holy Spirit enters each of us and gives us some very special skills and abilities that are meant to be shared to build up the church. Some receive gifts in administration, some in music, some in giving, some in hospitality, some in teaching, some in speaking in tongues, some in interpreting those tongues, and so on. As happens with all of us, people with different gifts started comparing them and debating over whose gift was the best and most important. Some people were given the gift of speaking in a special God language which they themselves did not understand but they interpreted as meaning they were connecting and praying to God in a more direct line. If speaking in these tongues is the most direct line to God, worship should revolve around speaking in tongues. Others had the gift of interpreting those tongues to allow everyone to hear and understand what was being said, which made their gift more important to the congregation because it served the congregation. Therefore, their interpretation of these tongues should be the focus of worship. Others knew teaching should be central, others healing, others singing, others helping. Paul responds to all this by sharing the incredible image of the church as the body of Christ of which we are all members. Just as the body is made up of different parts which all work together to form one body, so it is with the church.

Well, fighting over whose spiritual gift is the most important and deserves the most attention is not something we fight over much anymore. At least not at the congregational level. We have divided ourselves into so many different denominations that I think we have at least one

denomination for each spiritual gift. If speaking in tongues is your gift and is important to you, you go to a church that does that. If teaching and learning is more your thing, you go to a church that emphasizes that. If you are all about music, there are churches whose worship is almost all music and others who have virtually no music. We don't fight as much about that anymore because we have already divided along those lines.

Our challenges revolve more around flavor. We don't really fight, but sometimes we push up against each other when it comes to things like music style or what clothing is appropriate or how casual or formal the worship should be. We do not completely agree about what aspects of worship and church should change with the times to stay current and relevant and which aspects should be an anchor which doesn't change and thereby calls us back from cultural conformity to God's truth. How do we as church deal with these differences? We do it like a body.

One of the newer fads in exercise is interval training. Interval training just means you run or swim or jump or whatever really fast and hard for a few minutes then slow down and recuperate for a few minutes then fast and hard then slow and so forth. We see advertisements on TV for exercise videos and machines that claim a full body workout in just 12 minutes. A 12 minute, full body workout is possible if your goal is calorie burning and weight loss, but if your goal is to keep a strong heart and lungs, you need to exercise at least 20 minutes with a consistent raised heart rate doing things like walking, jogging, swimming, and biking. But if weight loss is your goal, consistent jogging or walking is not your most efficient option. In other words, some exercises are great for some things but not others and visa-versa.

As the body of Christ in church, we recognize that every part of worship is not designed for us. Some parts of this body thrive on upbeat, contemporary music while others are fed by our greatest hymns. Some of us crave those quiet times in worship like the morning prayer and communion while others would rather get up and have faithful discussions with their neighbor. Some like the sermon to be filled with new knowledge and deep thoughts that keep them thinking long after leaving the sanctuary while others have had their fill after the children's moment. We come to worship as a body, knowing those intervals of music may not be designed for me and my part of the body while the 20 minutes of words are not designed for another part of the body. We try to keep a balance in worship so both the heart is strengthened and the calories are burned. If we are doing our job, we probably have parts of worship that just don't speak to you – because they are speaking to someone else – another part of the body. The same is true with how we call you to action. Some really want the church to be more involved in justice ministries like serving the least of these in our midst, fighting for the rights of women and divorced, white males and married couples, immigrants, homosexuals and the poor; while others know the most important thing we can do is help people build their relationship with God through personal piety, moral living, prayer and devotion. The reality is those are the two parts of the Great Commandment – loving God and loving our neighbor – and we need to do them both. Different parts of the body specialize in different activities, but both parts of the Great Commandment are essential. Is the church supposed to be all about winning new people to

Christ or feeding the people we have? Is it about numerical growth or spiritual growth? Of course the answer is “yes”.

We are a body – the body of Christ – and it is not just us. I may be a knuckle which is part of the finger that is First Christian Church which is part of the hand which is the Indiana Region which part of the lower arm which is the General or International Disciples of Christ which is part of the larger body of Christ which is made up of all the churches in all the different denomination all around the world and through the ages.

Sing it with me:

“I am the Church. You are the church.

We are the church together

All who follow Jesus, all around the world

Yes, we’re the church together.”

It is not all about me, but I am a vital part of it. That is where we find the balance.

Mike Van Heyningen