

"BODY BUILDING"
A Sermon On 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
January 24, 2010
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Right from the beginning I remind you that this wonderfully visual section in 1 Corinthians using the image of the body made of many parts yet striving for the same purpose segues directly into the “Love Chapter” of 1 Corinthians 13. It is as though Paul anticipates that the community of faith will have trouble with his “body” simile. Paul was casting about for an image that would make the point that coming together in Christian discipleship requires that we drop all striving for self aggrandizement and work together to strengthen the community of faith – referred to as the Body of Christ. If working together respectfully for the strengthening of the community is confusing he says at the end, “I will show you a still more excellent way.” That is when he launches into, “Love is patient...”

Body building is a good description of where we are in the church these days. This has nothing to do with the narcissism present in our society. It has to do with Paul's image present in today's scripture of the church as the body of Christ and each of us being a member of that body. I am deeply troubled by our collective tendency to criticize and despair over other parts of the church - over other parts of the Body of Christ. Just as I have failed to see that I am healthy and functioning well, so we in the church have taken to criticizing one another and condemning our imperfections.

Years ago Charles Schultz did several Peanuts cartoons in which Snoopy goes for a jog. I share one of those comic strips with you now. Please be attentive to the screen.

PLAY POWER POINT

The fact is that it takes all our parts working together even imperfectly to keep us going. We can discuss and even argue along the way, but as soon as we refuse to cooperate with one another on our discipleship journey together, like Snoopy's morning jog, we lose the joy of it.

We in the church have become body conscious and many of the parts of Christ's body are busy spending all of their energy pointing out the imperfections of the other body parts. We look into our ecclesiastical morning mirror and all we see are things to complain about. Our congregations are too old. Our worship is too stiff. Our ministry lacks vision, and our pastors are lazy. We look at ourselves and all we see are the imperfections and the disappointments.

The great tragedy is that this obsessive trivial self criticism goes on in a world where tragedy abounds – witness the suffering currently experienced in Haiti. A world where homeless still sleep in the streets, where unwanted children face loveless lives of scant opportunity, where drug and alcohol abuse destroy countless lives, and where millions of people live with no knowledge of God's saving act in Jesus the Christ. In a world filled with suffering, injustice and pain we are distracted by our self absorbed arguments within our own Christian community complaining that other Christians are defective, imperfect, or impure; shame on us. In the words of my children when they have had enough of my self critical, blessing denying, whining, **GET A LIFE.**

GET A LIFE! How ironic! We have a life! What Paul is telling us in this wonderful passage is that Christ is now our life. Preaching is not our life. Teaching is not our life. Giving is not our life. Christ is now our life. It is through our preaching, through our teaching, through our giving, through our doing whatever we have been given by God to do that we share this life in Christ with one another. The acceptability of whatever we do in the Body of Christ does not depend upon the perfection of our doing but rather upon our willingness to do it. This is doing not out of duty, not out of obligation, but rather out of the profound appreciation of the gift God gave us in Jesus the Christ. This doing is a grateful and joyful response to Jesus the Christ.

How I wish that we would quit complaining about all our imperfections and just get about the work of being the Body of Christ. So what if some of us know God in a way that causes us to raise our hands as we sing in worship. So what if others of us know God in such a way that we are moved to sign petitions urging an end to injustice. So what if some of us prefer to sing THE OLD RUGGED CROSS while others prefer to sing GOD OF THE SPARROW, GOD OF THE WHALE. All of these things are needed. It is not ours to perfect. It is God who will take whatever we bring to the body and use it to strengthen the body. God can use you. God can use me. God can use others that would surprise both you and me.

The Good News is that in Christ all distinctions are erased. We are made one in Christ. All the divisions we cling to so loyally in this worldly life mean nothing in God's kingdom. All of our imperfections and shortcomings are rendered insignificant in the love of Christ which binds us

together. I have reached a time in my life when I have become extremely body conscious. But I try not to obsess over the imperfections of my aging physical body. Instead I seek to rejoice that I share a place with all who know Jesus in the Body of Christ. Just as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we belong together. THANKS BE TO GOD.

1 Corinthians 12:12 - 31 (NRSV)

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. And I will show you a still more excellent way.