

Finding Our Place in the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12-20

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Christian artist, Twila Paris, does a song entitled, "How Beautiful is the Body of Christ." Some of the lyrics go like this:

How beautiful when humble hearts give the fruit of pure lives so others may live. How beautiful the hands that serve the wine and the bread to the sons of earth. How beautiful is the body of Christ.

The Church is the body of Christ. The world calls the Church an institution. Not all of us feel a need for an institution. Others call the Church a great society. Not all of us are into societies. St. Paul called the Church the body of Christ and gave us a lasting impression of its diversity and unity in today's text.

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though the parts are many, they form one body. So, it is with Christ. For we are all one body."

The Psalmist said, "Humans are intricately and wonderfully made." We are complex combinations of skeletal systems, nerve systems, digestive systems, and circulatory systems. Our bodies are composed of 100 trillion cells, yet each person's DNA is unique.

Some body parts are highly visible, others are purely functional, yet all are necessary.

Paul says the Church is like that. We are the Body of Christ. The body has many parts and each part is essential.

In the body effective communication results in unity and understanding. People participate in proportion to their understanding. There is another side to communication. Occasionally, folk say to me, "I just don't know everything that is going on in this church." I respond, "Neither do I. Isn't that wonderful?" The need to control can limit a church whether the controllers are staff or laity. If I must be involved to affirm a ministry, I am destined to be miserable. This Body has many parts: the worship service, Sunday school classes, Bible Study, services to the community and outreach programs some I have never visited. To all that, I say "Hallelujah!"

You who stuff bulletins and paint walls are just as important as those who work the Food Cupboard and teach Sunday school. Thank God for our nursery worker who serves our children every Sunday!

Let there be no jealousy, nor pride in the body of Christ. We just have no place for that. We in the United Church of Christ are not the only Christians in the world. Our baptismal waters are not more sacred than others. Our altars of Holy Communion must always be open to all. Our unique place in polarized Christianity may well be the extreme middle where left and right, black and white, male and female, gay and straight, transgender and bisexuals, as well as non-binary can be loved and accepted as complete children of God.

Jesus said to his competitive disciples who were arguing about greatness along the road, "If anyone wants to be first, they must be the very last, and the servant of all." "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body and given one spirit to drink."

How can we be truly one? We can check our egos at the door. Occasionally, someone pays me a visit to complain that the church is not meeting their needs. While I am always concerned about effective means of ministry, I suggest the concern is more secular than spiritual. Customers question the effectiveness of providers to meet their needs. You are not a customer; you are a child of God.

We were baptized into one Body. Two things happen at baptism. We are claimed and cleansed. We die with Christ at Baptism in order that we can be raised with Christ to new life. You are a loved child of God. So, get over earning it, proving it, asserting it, defending it, demanding it. Take it from one who has tried it. None of that works.

We are cleansed from all unrighteousness. At baptism we are saved from rugged individualism that assumes we must do it ourselves and initiated into a community that lives by a new set of values.

The old Life Says: Look out for number 1.

Grab all you can. Don't get angry, get even.

Compete at all costs.

The one with the most toys wins.

New Life Affirms: Find yourself by losing yourself.

Give all you can. Forgive as God has forgiven you.

Cooperate with all people. The one who knows Christ lives.

We can focus on Christ. Colossians 1:18 says, "Christ is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning and the first born from the dead so that in everything he might have supremacy."

The Church is not about buildings, budgets, and bigness. The Church is not about people, programs, progress. The Church is about Jesus Christ. There is a very dreaded thing that sometimes occurs in the human body. A mutiny happens. We call it a tumor. If the tumor is malignant, we are in trouble. Cancer is a group of disloyal cells that decide to defy inhibition. They multiply without regard to other cells. They grow wild and try every way possible to take complete control. Each is a healthy, functioning cell but totally disloyal to the rest of the body. Out of control cancer cells will kill you, as many of us know. When the Church stops taking its cues from Christ, disaster and death are eminent.

We can unite in service to others.

A teenager lost an arm in an awful accident. She was so embarrassed at the handicap that she refused to go to church or school for a whole year. Finally, she agreed to try Sunday school. Her mother called the teacher and asked that nothing be done to draw attention to Jamie's missing hand. The teacher agreed. But he got sick that day and a substitute led the class in inviting friends to church. At the end of class, he asked the students to join him in that little jingle, "Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and there are the people." It was enough to make Jamie cry until a thirteen-year-old boy in the class realized what she was feeling. He dropped down beside her and put one hand against her good hand and together they demonstrated what a real church is all about.

We are the hands of Christ. We are the feet of Christ. We are the only Bible the careless world will read. We are the gospel. We are the scoffer's creed. A cup of cold water in Jesus' name makes an eternal difference.

You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it.