

The Third Sunday After the Epiphany
January 31, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26,27

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!"... 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. (NIV)

The human body is really an amazing machine, isn't it? Doctors who spend their entire lives specializing in just one part of the body, whether it be the heart or the brain, will admit there is so much even they don't know about how or why everything always works. God's wisdom is certainly on display when it comes to a human body. No wonder king David proclaimed: "***I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.***" (Psalm 139)

Another amazing thing about the human body is how all the parts work together. From head to toe the body is one unit, yet it has many parts. I tried to google human body to get some idea of how many parts make up a human body and there were so many pictures and parts that I gave up after about a half an hour. So I will just tell you there are a lot of different parts that make up a body. And all those many parts work to make up and serve the one body.

This wonderful human body is what the Lord uses to illustrate a point for us. Paul uses the human body to describe an even more amazing body - one of which you and I are a part. Paul writes: "***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.***" Christ's body is the Church of which He is the head. Christ's body too has many parts - believers. This morning God's Word directs us to something worthy of our unending praise and thanks as we focus on: **The wonderful body of Christ.**

While Paul writes to a church in the city of Corinth of many years ago, he could just as easily be talking to our congregation because the same truths apply. He writes about spiritual gifts and reminds us that every single person has at least one. Every person also has different gifts. These gifts were something to be thankful for and rejoice in; these gifts were to be used for the common good. But in Corinth there was jealousy,

and misuse, and anger, and envy over these gifts. These gifts were being used to divide. And the devil just loves to play the game of divide and conquer in the church.

In my time here at Amazing Grace I have not witnessed a big struggle with this. Part of the blessing of being a small congregation is a family type of unity that we enjoy. At our voter's meeting today we will fill the slate of officers for our Church Council, but I don't imagine too much fighting over the positions. In my time here we have never had more than one person, if even one person, willing and able to serve in each of the various areas. The same is true for filling many other areas of service in our church. But as I filled out our end of the year statistics I noted that the Lord blessed us with 16 new members in 2009. If it is the Lord's will that we continue to grow at that pace there will be many more parts to our body. Their might be more temptations to fight and bicker over leadership roles or even non-leadership roles.

Even as a small congregation all I have to do is look at my own sinful self and the sinful nature that lives in each one of you to know that we too need to hear these words. There is plenty of room for jealousy, and bickering, and envy here at Amazing Grace. The devil can get us to argue about the little things, and he wants to divide us. We can become envious of others or look down on others who don't seem to be doing as much to serve the Lord. Like little kids who take their ball home and pout, the devil would like us to do the same when it comes to Christ's church. The devil wants each one of us to think it is all about us.

What if our body parts started acting that way? It's silly, isn't it? That is the picture Paul presents. ***"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!'"***

Do you see the point? Every part of the body works together. That is how a body is made. Every part has a role. So it is with the body of Christ. How foolish to be jealous or envious or to use our gifts to divide when we are all part of the same body. Not all parts are good at teaching, not all are to be leaders, not all are good at giving generously, not all are good with technology or music, not all our good encouragers, but each person has a role. The gifts you do have come from God. He arranges the parts of the body. He knows what our congregation needs and gives us gifts as He sees fit. If our bodies had ears that wanted to be eyes the body would have some problems. But that is not how the body works and that is not how it is to be in the body of Christ.

God not only arranges our gifts, but He tells us that every one of us is a useful part to the body. The eye needs the hand if it going to grab that delicious steak that it sees. If the head has something to say it needs the feet to get it to where it needs to be said. They eye and head cannot say to the hand and foot: ***"I don't need you!"*** In other words you are an meaningful part of the body of Christ - no matter what gifts or role God has given you. You are important. You are important to each other and to God. When

you cease to come and be a part of our church family it is not just about what you are missing out on, but others are missing out on what you have from God to help them.

In fact, Paul writes “***If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.***” This is so true of the human body, isn’t it? If you smash your little toe the whole body suffers with it. I have dislocated this pinky seven times and I can tell you when it happens it hurts more than just the little finger. Or, on the other side, if your hands achieve something great, it isn’t just the hands that get rewarded - the whole body is honored. So it is with the body of believers. We are able to share with one another our trials and also our triumphs. When one of us suffers, we suffer along with them. When one of us rejoices, we rejoice along with them.

Do you start to get the point of our Scripture lesson today? There is a unity, a harmony, and a cooperation unlike any other. It is like that of a human body with every part working together to serve the whole. That is the wonderful body of Christ. The reason you and are in it is not because we are so great and gifted that we deserve it, but because by grace we were baptized by one Spirit. By grace we heard the good news of Jesus and “***we were all given the one Spirit to drink.***” By grace God sent Jesus to live for sinners who were once slaves and prisoners. By grace God sent Jesus to suffer and die on the cross for sinners who lived in darkness and were destined for eternal darkness. By grace God sent Jesus to rise victoriously from the grave for sinners who once were useless.

Do we recognize what Jesus, our head, did so that we could become part of His body? Do we understand the depth of His love for us so that sinners like you and me are able to belong to Him? Do we see how Jesus has given our lives value, how He has made us useful no matter what our spiritual gifts or role in His Church? Do we realize the tremendous blessings we enjoy as a part of the body of Christ? Whether we consider ourselves an eye or an ear, or just a thumbnail, as long as we are part of the wonderful body of Christ what more could we ask?

Jesus, our loving head, supplies all we need for life and will one day take us to be with Him in heaven. Jesus loved us so much that He shed His own blood on the cross to pay for all our sins including our foolish jealousy, and envy, and pride. That saving, forgiving love is what unites us into one body - a body that works together for the common good. We now have a common goal - to live for Him who gave Himself for us - to bring glory to our Lord in all we do. Today, we are reminded of a body even more amazing than the human body, a body that displays not only God’s wisdom but also His unswerving love - the wonderful body of Christ! We give thanks and praise to our Lord that, because of His grace, Paul’s words apply to us: “***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.***” Amen.

