

3rd Sunday after Epiphany
January 27, 2019
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Your Spiritual Gift Is Important

1 Corinthians 12:12–21, 26-27 (NIV84)

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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ 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!”

²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week Paul encouraged us and the believers in Corinth to use our spiritual gifts for the common good. The Corinthian congregation had been blessed with many spiritual gifts and believers were tempted to use these to gain honor for themselves among the congregation. Some of these gifts were spectacular like being able to perform miracles and speaking in languages they did not learn. Others were a bit more subdued like the spiritual gift of helping others or even more exciting, the spiritual gift of administration. You can imagine the member with the gift of administration doing something like organizing the offering the congregation was sending to the poor in Jerusalem. As he is counting the money and preparing the offering for transport, he looks over at the member with the gift of healing. This believer has just healed a man of his blindness. Could there be some envy on the part of the money counter? “I wish I had an important spiritual gift like the healer.” Or might there be some pride as the healer looks over at the money counter and thinks, “I’m glad I have an important spiritual gift unlike that admin guy over there.”

Therefore, Paul uses the illustration of the body to demonstrate to the counter and to the healer and to every believer, “Your Spiritual Gift Is Important.” He tells us that the body will suffer without you and your gift. But on the other hand, the body will rejoice with you as you use your spiritual gifts as part of the body.

The Body Suffers Without You

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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not

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Paul sets up a rather ridiculous scenario here. Feet and ears that talk?! Parts of the body that want to leave the body or be other parts. Eyes and heads trying to get rid of lesser parts of the body! None of these things happen in the human body. Unfortunately, these things do happen in the body of Christ, in a congregation of believers.

Every believer has been given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit. Some of the gifts Paul lists here and in his other letters are being a pastor, teacher or evangelist. Others spiritual gifts are leadership, helping others, administration, serving, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, and showing mercy. As I listed these, did you think of specific people when a certain gift was read? Maybe you have someone in mind who has a gift for leadership. People unite around this person and their ideas are often followed. Maybe you know someone who is a natural encourager. They know just what to say in every situation. Or you know someone with the gift of teaching. This person can explain the deep truths of God in an interesting way to children and to adults. Perhaps the gift of serving brings to mind a believer who is ready to help out anyone at anytime. They love to serve and look for ways to serve others. It is wonderful to see how God gives his believers a variety of spiritual gifts that work together in the body of Christ.

But if you had the opportunity to choose your own spiritual gifts, what would you choose? The believers in Corinth considered some gifts better than others. Pastors and teachers might have been good gifts, but they also had people who could do miracles, heal, prophecy and speak in other languages. These were considered the really good spiritual gifts. This is what the believers really wanted. Therefore, those with the gift of serving or administration or encouraging were not honored as much as the others. In Paul’s example of the body of Christ, those with the better gifts think they can do fine without those with lesser gifts. But Paul rebukes such thoughts. *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!”*

Of course, a person can survive without hands but life is more difficult. A person can survive without feet but life is more difficult. The body works better when all of its God-given parts are working together. Have we ever looked at another believer and thought something like, “The church would get along just fine without that person.”? Of course the church can get along without a lot of us but the body suffers when even one member is missing, when even one member is not making use of their spiritual gift for the common good. Look around this morning and think about members of our congregation who are not here today. Can we get along without them? Yes, but our congregation suffers without them. We are missing out on whatever spiritual gifts they have been given.

While many in Corinth sinned by looking down on those with lesser spiritual gifts, those with the lesser gifts would face a different temptation. Jealousy. Have you ever wanted to have the gifts of another believer. That person is a gifted communicator. Why didn’t God give me that gift. That person is a great evangelist. Why can’t I be like them? That believer is so good at showing mercy and I keep missing opportunities to show mercy. Why didn’t God make me like them? Why did I get the unimportant gifts of the Spirit, the boring gifts of the Spirit, the gifts I didn’t really want. You see, jealousy can turn into a feeling of worthlessness. I’m not important in the body of Christ because my spiritual gift is not as good as someone else’s. Paul tells us how foolish this is when he writes: *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. ¹⁶ 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.

Every single part of the body is important and every believer is important to the body of Christ. Jesus himself is the head of the Christian Church, his body. Christ is the only one who can truly say to a member of his body, “I don’t need you.” Christ does not need any of us. He is the one, true God who existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from before time began. He did not need us then. Christ did not need his mother or his disciples to help him accomplish his mission of saving the world from sin, death and the devil. In fact, they were obstacles at times to his mission. Our spiritual gifts are nothing compared to Christ. We are truly unimportant compared with Jesus. He could easily say about every sinner, “I don’t need you” and cut us out of the body of Christ but he doesn’t.

Christ Jesus takes worthless sinners and makes us part of his body, the church. He washed us clean in baptism. He continues to forgive us through his Word and his body and blood in Holy Communion. We who look down on the other members of Christ’s body, who are jealous of others, who sin against other believers daily are valued by Christ above his own physical body. He willingly gave himself to suffering and death on the cross to forgive all our sins. Christ makes us more important than himself. Every believer is an important part of the body of Christ because Christ gave his holy, precious blood for each one.

Every believer is important and given important gifts of the Spirit to use in the body of Christ. When we see every part of the body of Christ as he sees us, then we rejoice in every believer and every spiritual gift.

The Body Rejoices With You

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Your spiritual gifts are different from my spiritual gifts. The way you use your Spirit given gifts will be different from the way I use my Spirit given gifts. Yet we are all united in the body of Christ and we are to rejoice with each other. And maybe this is the best way for us to recognize our spiritual gifts. Instead of trying to figure it out on our own, other believers can recognize and encourage us to use our spiritual gifts.

I was an extremely shy child and teenager. I never would have thought to be a pastor on my own. But others encouraged me to use my spiritual gifts in this way and I rejoice that they did. Maybe you know a believer who thinks they have nothing to offer in the body of Christ, who thinks they are unimportant and rather worthless. But you notice in them a natural ability to work with young children and encourage them to teach Sunday School or be a preschool teacher. Or you notice someone who is a good organizer with the gift of administration and you encourage them to serve on the church council or coordinate a small group. Or you know someone with the gift of encouragement and you introduce them to someone who could use encouragement. Or you see someone who loves to help others or give gifts and you thank them for using their spiritual gifts. When Christians use their spiritual gifts in their families, among friends and in their congregation, the body of Christ rejoices because the members of the body are working together just as God intended. Every spiritual gift is important.

Amen.