

SERMON 15TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“WE NEED EACH OTHER” BASED ON PSALM 133 AND 1 COR. 12:12-31

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The reading today comes from one of the most profound and timeless passages in 1 Corinthians 12. In this text, Paul paints a vivid picture of the Church as the body of Christ—made up of many different members, each with unique roles and gifts, yet all belonging to one another and working together in unity.

When we read Paul’s letters as a whole, we discover that Paul makes more than thirty references to the idea of the body of Christ. And yet, sometimes we simply hear that phrase “*the body of Christ*” and move on without stopping to consider what it really means.

Perhaps we skip over it because we think it is simply an illustration. Or perhaps we find it too abstract to understand. *What does it really mean that the Church is the body of Christ?*

But before we go deeper into that question, I want us to pause for a moment and think about something much more familiar to all of us: the word “body.”

I don’t know about you, but in my limited experience, many people have complicated relationships with their own bodies.

When I was living in Vancouver, I had the privilege of serving in two senior housing communities for a couple of years. One thing I often heard was the sadness and sometimes frustration people felt about the changes happening in their bodies. They would say, “*I just can’t do what I used to do.*” Things that once seemed simple—baking, running, walking, or even just getting from one place to another—had become much more difficult as they are now 80 or 90 years old. And perhaps some of us here can relate to that.

But, I can say that this not only happens with seniors, because younger people struggle with their bodies too, just in different ways. Many that I talked with feel insecure because they compare themselves to models, celebrities, and influencers they see online. They often wonder whether they are attractive enough, thin enough, strong enough, or beautiful enough. They compare themselves to images of what society tells them a “perfect body” should look like.

And at the same time, there are others who take great care of their bodies, young or old. They exercise, eat carefully, and work hard to maintain their health. They see their bodies as something valuable—something that needs attention, care, and discipline. And they often very proud of how their body looks like and either use it to motivate people or just simply to look down at people who don't look like them.

So friends, what I try to say here is whether we are young or old, whether we feel confident about our bodies or struggle to accept them, whether we are grateful for what our bodies can still do or frustrated by what they can no longer do, the truth is: We all know something about what it means to have a body.

Because every one of us lives in one.

We experience joy through our bodies. We experience pain through our bodies. Our bodies change as we grow older. Sometimes they are strong, and sometimes they are weak. Sometimes they allow us to do things with ease, and sometimes they remind us of our limitations.

And perhaps that is why Paul's image is so powerful.

Paul does not choose something distant or unfamiliar to describe the Church. He chooses something every one of us knows intimately.

A body.

And here is where Paul begins to take this familiar reality and turn it into something much deeper.

When we read the Corinthians, the context we need to aware that Paul was addressing a group of Christians in the city of Corinth who came from diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and upbringings. In addition to these differences, there was another factor that set them apart which he called spiritual gifts. Some individuals possessed spiritual gifts, while others did not.

It seems that in the Corinthian church, they had become obsessed with the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, or speaking in a language that they had not studied or learned. It may sound strange to us, but this gift had become for them a litmus test for whether you were truly in the "elite spiritual club" or not.

And throughout the whole book of Corinthians, division in the church has been a major point Paul addressed. He has addressed factious and misplaced loyalties, judging others, people looking down on others, and division because of financial abilities between the poor and the rich to name a few.

And in the passage we just read, it's about some people getting prideful in their gifts or role in the church and looking down on those whose gifts aren't as public or visible. And Paul shoots their pride out of the water and tells them how a Christ-like church should run.

Whether we like it or not, as believers, we are all in the same boat. We may come from different backgrounds, hold different perspectives, and see certain matters in life very differently—but we are still connected to one another.

In many ways, it is like being part of a family.

Some of you may remember what it was like to live with your siblings under the same roof. You probably loved them—but that doesn't mean you liked everything about them! If someone asked you to make a list of the things that annoyed you about your siblings, I am sure some of you could come up with quite a long list. There were probably things they did that frustrated you, habits you wished they would change, or opinions you simply could not understand. And yet, at the end of the day, they were still your family.

You could disagree with them. You could get frustrated with them. You could even wish for some distance from them once in a while. But you could not simply change the fact that you belonged to the same family.

And perhaps, over time, you learned something important: when you cannot escape one another, you might as well learn how to love one another. And I believe that is part of what Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians.

The church in Corinth was not a community where everyone thought alike or agreed on everything. In fact, they had plenty of disagreements and divisions. They came from different backgrounds, had different gifts, different social positions, and different ideas. But Paul reminds them—and reminds us—that in the Church, we belong to one another. In God's eyes, no one is more valuable than someone else.

Now, this does not mean that we are all the same. It does not mean that God wants us to become clones, think exactly alike, or all do the same things. There is great diversity in the body of Christ. Different gifts, different personalities, different experiences, and even different ways of serving.

To start, let's read verse 18. *"But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as God wanted them to be."* With illustrations about foot, hand, ear, and eyes from verse 12-26, this is the main point. God gave each member the gifts God wanted them to have and put them in the area of service God wanted them to be.

What does it mean? You might ask. It simply means each one of us have a role in the church. Each one of you members of Stamford Presbyterian Church have role in the service of this church family.

There is not a believer in this entire world that God doesn't have some work planned for and that doesn't have the proper means/gift to accomplish God's work. Your role might not be public speaking or singing and leading. But it is essential nonetheless.

In his letter, Paul basically said, if you have a more visible role than others, you must not ever look down on them or get puffed up. We are all in the same boat and we are all there because of God's grace, not because of our skills.

So the questions worth to reflect for us as a member of community:

- Are you using your gift?
- Are you actively serving others?
- Are you concerned about the common good?

Paul reminds us that some parts of the human body are absolutely essential for life, even though they may seem weaker, less visible, or less impressive than other parts. In fact, many of the parts we depend on the most are the ones we rarely notice and almost never praise.

We might compliment someone on having a strong arm for football, broad shoulders, strong legs for hiking, or even beautiful hair—because those are the things we can easily see. But how

often do we compliment someone by saying, “*You have wonderful white blood cells!*” Or, “*Your heartbeat is incredibly consistent!*” Or, “*You have such healthy lungs!*”

Probably never!

And yet, we know how important those things are. We may not see them, and we may not talk about them very often, but without them, our bodies simply cannot function as they should.

And I believe this is exactly the point Paul is trying to make. Some parts of the body may receive more attention and praise than others, but every part is important. Some parts may appear stronger. Some may be more visible. But if one of those quieter, hidden, or seemingly weaker parts stops functioning, we quickly realize just how much we depend on it.

The same is true in the Church. There are people whose gifts are visible to everyone. Some are strong in public speaking and become a preacher and scripture readers. Some are good and like to sing and be part of church choir. But there are also so many people whose ministry happens quietly and often without recognition.

Paul then writes,

“But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.”
(1 Cor. 12:24-26)

In the Corinthian church, the “weak” were in fact being despised and shamed by some of the others (v.22). So Paul calls the church to a better way of life together. Differences within the church are, astonishingly, something that God has arranged (v.18). I can’t imagine how boring it would be if we all have the same gifts/talents.

And then Paul proclaims, “*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*” (1 Cor. 12: 27)

This sentence reminds us that we are the body of Christ, which means we are responsible to be Jesus in this world. We are responsible to try to do what Jesus did. To say what Jesus said. And to love as Jesus loved.

If we look at ourselves as the body of Christ, part by part. When a part is missing, it hurts us. If a part is missing, then we are going to say something and try to do something to bring them back.

You might be familiar with saying, “The church is one body.” The church, this congregation, needs all of the different gifts we have, to do the work of the body of Christ. We have many different personalities, many different gifts and interests, many different ways of looking at the world, many different life-experiences, and types of education, and work-experiences, and the lists can go on and on.

None of us are the same as anyone else. And all of us have been brought together into one community to be the body of Christ in the world. To be Christ-like human being each and everyday in our life. That is who we are. That is our identity.

Knowing that identity, what then we supposed to do is to support the mission and purpose of the church, of God’s Kingdom. There are lots of answers to this, but today a helpful answer might be learned by coming back to Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ. Our mission and purpose, simply put, is to be the body of Christ in the world, as an individual as well as a community. To spark light of hope in the midst of darkness of our world.

As God comes in human flesh through Jesus Christ and blessed the people around Him 2000 years ago. As Jesus comes into the world, proclaim his identity, and made changes in people’s heart. We all are asked to go as a church, to do what Christ did: to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim the good news of God’s love for all, and to share God’s mercy to all people, particularly the marginalized.

Church is not just about worship on Sunday, beyond that it is also very much about responding to what happens out in the world, the world where people long to receive the love and grace and mercy of our amazing God, through us.

I remember I read somewhere that, “Community or group of people who have same mindset and perspective can be more powerful to build but also to destroy.” And I hope we can wisely decide which one we want to do, starting today, from small steps, as faithful community that we call church family. Amen.