

1 Cor. 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

12 For 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. **13** For 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.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If 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. **16** And 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. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many members yet one body. **21** The 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.” **22** On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and 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, **24** whereas our more respectable members do not need this.

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, **25** that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **28** And 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. **29** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work powerful deeds? **30** Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? **31** But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

One Body

The Corinthian Christians were a contentious bunch. They were gifted, articulate and passionate about their faith. They were also rather cliquish, competitive and boastful it would seem.

Historians tell us that the city of Corinth had a reputation. Corinth was known as kind of the ‘sin city’ of its day. It was said that it had wealth without culture and disregard and abuse of the poor.¹ The church in Corinth, to which Paul was writing, was really not one congregation but a collection of smaller congregations within the community, maybe kind of like a presbytery. It is clear from Paul’s letter that the church, much like the community around it, had gotten into a pattern of divisive, arrogant and segregated ways, spending more time arguing about and articulating their *differences* than focusing on what they shared in common. Unfortunately this sounds painfully familiar, both with regard to our nation, and the church at times.

Corinth was a melting pot place. There was wealth along side poverty. It was located south and west of Athens on a strip of land between two major gulfs of water in the Mediterranean Sea. It was a religious and commercial hub as sailors and travelers passed through regularly between sea ports. Some of the travelers chose to settle in Corinth and they brought with them their religions, their cultures and their values.

Corinth was also known for its artisans, with bronze and pottery pieces being the most frequent items found in the archeological digs. There was a lot of creative talent there. It was also a political hub for the reigning Roman government. So politicians and government officials were a part of the community as well. I would imagine that if you were to poll the citizens of Corinth in Paul’s day you would find a wide variety of opinions regarding their city and its inhabitants. It is not wise to draw strict comparisons between different time periods, but we can safely say that people are people and there are probably some things that don’t change.

It was into this place that Paul came to establish a church. It appears that he lived in Corinth and worked to found the church for about 3 years before he moved on and communicated with them through letters, some of which we have preserved in our Bible. He knew these people well and writes to them with authority and

¹ Interpreter’s Bible, Volume 10, pg. 775.

sometimes very direct and firm critique, but also with *great love* for them as individuals and as a community.

Though a good bit of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in our Bible contains his straightforward dealings with contentious camps within the church and his advice and admonishments for the things he believes they are doing wrong, the passage we read today gives us a glimpse of what they are doing right or at least what he wants them to focus on.

With his familiar image of the human body, Paul creates a beautiful picture of what the church is called to be. It is a treatise on the delicate balance between the **unity and diversity** we are called to live as Christians. Here Paul celebrates the diverse gifts present in the body of Christ in general and in this Corinthian church in particular. As one commentator put it, "Paul is not at all interested in *transforming* the wildly, richly diverse Corinthians into some bland homogeneous conglomerate."² That is not what the church of Christ is to be. The members of the church have tremendous and varied gifts. Their call is to use those gifts as the body of Christ in the world.

Paul is articulate and clear. He begins by reminding them of the common root out of which all these gifts grow. "In 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". Even the most basic social relations do not override our common connection in the one Spirit. All are welcome.

From there he illustrates his point. Where would we be if we were all foot or hand or all ear or eye? No, God arranged the members of the body, each one as God chose so that we would be the miraculous beings we are. This is true for the body that is the church as well. We as a community, need all parts, prophets, teachers, healers, leaders, followers, dreamers.

But Paul does not let them forget the connectedness they share. They are inseparably woven together. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it". Paul includes in this part of his affirmation of the Corinthians a very direct reminder, "the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable

² *Homiletics*, Jan/Feb 2004, pg. 28.

members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this.” Remember, you are one body.

We today are not Corinthians nor is the Corinthian church our church. Christianity is not a new religion struggling to carve out its place in the culture and the community, as it was in Paul’s day. But there are similarities that make the words of Paul’s letters ring true for us still today.

The Christians in Corinth were members of their culture just as they were members of their church. They struggled with how to live faithfully in their world. They were pulled in many directions with a difficult task of discerning how to live and be in their world. They were products of their place and time, *and* believers in Christ.

We have a similar task today. We too are called to live our faith in the world in which we live, both individually, eyes, ears, feet and hands, and as a community working together. We are called to make choices with how we use our time and our resources in order to share God’s grace, love and justice. Sometimes those choices are easy. Sometimes they can be very difficult.

We live and work and play here in the U.S., in California, in San Jose in 2025. That is a lot right now. So many choices in where to put our time and energy, our prayers. You are a congregation open your doors to all. You provide support for immigrants. You give time and financial resources to many organizations.. As individuals, some of you serve on boards and committees and in other ways volunteer your time to organizations that impact the local community. You work in jobs or attend school and decide daily how you will relate to those around you. And beyond the community that is right before our eyes many of you give time, money, your creativity and prayer to issues of justice and peace and compassion throughout the world.

We make choices regarding how we will use our time and our talents. In so doing we are living our faith here and now. In our work, in our play and in our living, we are continually called to remember our gifts and our talents and our uniqueness, **and our** unity as one body in the Spirit of God, respecting and honoring one another. Daily we must choose how to live and be in our place and time. Paul’s message continues to ring true for us here and now.

Our gospel reading for this morning, the story Emily read from Luke, is Luke’s version of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. According to Luke Jesus begins his

ministry with a proclamation of who he is and what he is about. He enters the synagogue and, reading from Isaiah says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. *Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Paul’s words to the Corinthians reflect Luke’s message. Luke proclaims Jesus’ message of the transforming power of God’s presence we know in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to bring good news to the poor and release to the captive and the oppressed. That is what Jesus was about in his ministry. Through the Holy Spirit we are that presence today. We are about that same task. Here in this community, in the nation, in our world. With the gifts God has given us, individually and united the ears, eye, hands, feet and voices of God today.

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Today, here, now, this scripture continues to be fulfilled in us.