

“We’re All in This Together”
I Corinthians 12:4-31a
January 26, 2020

This Sunday is our annual meeting, our response to a call that God is placing on all of us to continue as His disciples, not just a call only for those of us who wear a collar. Paul’s words which I read this morning from his first letter to the Corinthian church show that no one gets a free pass from being an active part of the body of Christ. No one. So obviously, we must think about what it means to be the body of Christ in this time and in this place.

But there’s a thought that precedes that question - who are indeed members of the body? It’s a question because some of us may not hear that WE are ALL vital to Christ’s body, assuming that only the professionals who’ve gone off to Divinity School, or who have prayed for most of their lives, are worthy of working for Christ and His Kingdom. The implication at the back of our minds is that the rest of us do not really matter, that we have little to offer, and even if we did have something to give, well, it wouldn’t make much difference.

The Corinthian church must have been saying such things because Paul addresses such self-doubts at great length, as we just heard this morning. This is so important theologically about what it means to be the church that I want you to hear it from another version of the Bible, the Message Bible, which puts it this way: “You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your body. Your body has many parts: limbs, organs, cells - but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body.”

It’s exactly the same as Christ. Through His one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our so-called life, what Paul elsewhere calls “the old me.” We each used to live independently, calling our own shots, but then we entered into a larger and more integrated life where Christ has the final say in everything. This is what was proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized. Each of us is now a part of Christ’s

resurrected body, refreshed and sustained by His one Spirit, where we drink from one source. The old labels we once used to identify the Old Me, labels such as Jew or Greek, slave or free, Republican or Democrat, are no longer sufficient for us as Christians. As followers of Christ, we need something larger and more comprehensive.

I want us to think about how all this makes us more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part, blown up into something huge. It's all about the different yet similar parts arranged and functioning together. So, to paraphrase the Apostle, if Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful, like Eye, limpid and expressive, then I don't deserve a place on the Head," would you want to remove your Head from your body? If the body was all Eye, how could it hear? If all Ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where He wanted it.

But I also want us to think about how this keeps our significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, any significance you have derives from what you are a part of. An enormous Eye or a gigantic Hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and its proper place. Again, no part is important on its own.

Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost, I don't need you." Or Head telling Foot, "You're fired! Your job has been phased out." As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way. The lower the part, the more basic and therefore the more necessary it really is. We can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. And when it's part of your own body that you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether it is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part is dependent on every other part: the parts we mention, and the parts we don't; the parts we see, and the parts we don't see. If one part hurts, for example, a migraine in your right eye, every other part is involved in the hurt and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into exuberance.

We are Christ's body - that is who we are! And we must never forget this truth! We are all vital to the work of God in our world. That is what the church is about, of course, its divine mission: the work of God in redeeming all of creation. It is not about our beautiful, historic building or the programs we run, or even our growing budget.

Don't mis-hear me. All of those things - budget, building, and programs - can be used to help equip us to play our vital roles in God's work. But if they only bring us here on Sundays so we can be consumers of God's spirituality, if we take part at the Colebrook Congregational Church only to see our friends, or because we have always been here, and if we don't go out into the world and take part in God's mission work, then we are really wasting a lot of our time.

Our church is here in order to form us as disciples as we experience, learn about, and worship the living God. We can only then, in turn, go out to make disciples who proclaim the good news of Christ.

And Jesus tells us what His good news is. We heard it just a couple of weeks ago, when He read from the ancient scroll from the Prophet Isaiah, "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 captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." That is the work Jesus did as he moved among the Jewish people who lived under the Roman Empire 2000 years ago.

We now as Christ's body, all of us, must continue that work as we move among our fellow citizens who live under the oppressive weight of life's experiences and too much information. We are all vital to that work of Christ. From our children to our

seniors, we can all share in spreading the love of Jesus Christ in this world and to proclaim by word and deed the Word of God in Christ.

For none of us is insignificant to God's mission in the world. We are, as Saint Paul said, members of Christ's body, with every part dependent upon every other part. We must never forget that. And therefore we must join together to bring Christ's good news to our broken and healing world during this coming year, and beyond.

May we do so with Christ's grace, and favor.

Let us pray: