

Ephny2.C1  
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2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
January 17, 2010

Isaiah 62:1-5  
1 Corinthians 12:1-11  
John 2:1-11

## **1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup>You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. <sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. <sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

I was working with a seminary professor to prepare a document for a state council of churches – a description of the purpose of the council. It was going to be pretty broad, as such statements are, and it was going to be generally in favor of churches. Early on, I trotted out the time-worn phrase "The Body of Christ". Paul started using that term to describe the church in the middle of the first century and I've never found one better. "The Body of Christ" is a great metaphor for the church. The man I was working with said he did not want to use the phrase, "The Body of Christ". I asked him why. He said he was tired of it. He had been studying and teaching the nature of the church for many years and everywhere he looked, around the world, throughout history, in every denomination,

people used the term “The Body of Christ”. He said it was stale and did not fire the imagination. He had a point. But, truth be told, I have read *many* documents that describe the nature of state councils of churches that fail to fire the imagination. I suggest we shoot at a different target. How about accurate, meaningful, and easy to remember? If those are the goals, we cannot beat “The Body of Christ”.

The foundation of Christianity is the belief that God took on a human body and came to live with people. God still lives among his people in the Body of Christ, the church. That may seem like an exaggeration, to call the church “the incarnation of God” when the church is behind on our budget, subject to building inspectors, and we have trouble getting the temperature right in the worship area. But Jesus, the original “Body of Christ”, also was short of money sometimes, subject to civil authorities, and his body was not immune to abuse.

The church is the incarnation of God; that is an article of our faith. When we confess the Apostles’ Creed in a few minutes we will say we believe in God the creator, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and we will confess that we believe in the holy catholic Church.

We are the Body of Christ. A body is a marvel of cooperation – sight, hearing, breathing, thinking – all going on at the direction of one person. In his letter to the Corinthians that we read this morning, Paul compares that cooperation in one body to the life we live together as the church. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Paul goes on to describe different things *individual* people do that make up the life we live *together*.

Please picture for me: Tomorrow morning, as you tell yourself for the final time that you have to get out of bed: at that point, your left hand announces that it doesn't see any reason for it. The hair was complimented yesterday and there is a good chance the ears will hear a song you like on your i-pod, which is all well-and-good for your hair and your ears, but are there any plans for the hand? He informs the lips and mouth to tell the rest of the body he is not planning to come along because he does not see what he is going to get out of it.

If you can see a hand lying by itself, lifeless and useless, then Paul has once again made his point about our life together. The body needs all of its parts. And all of the parts need to be part of the body.

I used a search engine on the internet to find how many churches and other organizations use both the word "Christian" and the word "Independent" in their title. There are over nine million. (There is even a World Council of Independent Christian Churches.) Two thousand years later, Jesus has still not won the argument with one self-centered body part or another that refuses to get out of bed with the rest of the body.

That is the problem, of course: self-centeredness. Think how often we have all heard statements like: "I quit going to church because I wasn't getting anything out of it.", "I'm looking for a place where I am comfortable.", "If I have a specific job to do at church, you can count on me to be there – but I don't want to just show up with nothing to do." Those are all the statements of an individual body part making *itself* the only measure of the health of the entire body.

Paul tells us different. We are all part of the Body of Christ, and no part can live alone.

For the past few days, we have seen news reports coming out of Haiti. Of those people who are still alive, they are hungry, injured, thirsty, cold, and grieving. It is obvious

that they need to be part of the world-wide Body of Christ for their survival. They need the rest of the body to give them nourishment, and comfort, and stability. What may be less obvious is the rest of the world-wide Body of Christ needs them for survival, too. We cannot survive as Christ in the world if we cut off parts of our own body.

We see the reports of the misery in Haiti and we hear people ask, “Where is God in all of this?” God is in the desperation to help. When you hear stories about people digging rubble with their bare hands, and planes loaded with supplies circling for hours around a disabled airport, and medical workers lined up in Florida, and Bush and Clinton at the White House yesterday pretending to like each other, and millions of dollars coming from a society reeling from unemployment – God is pretty easy to see.

God is in the tears, and the money, and the energy, and the prayers.

The Body of Christ is easy to see in times of heroic, life-and-death struggles; but The Body of Christ was just as important last week when we were struggling with the everyday issues of our church. Here at Peace Lutheran, we were not talking about an earthquake last week; we were trying to find volunteers to help prepare communion, and make coffee on Sunday Morning, and chair the meetings of the Education Committee. We were wondering why attendance is down at Peace Lutheran (at least *I* was) and why the choices we make as individuals often have little to do with the rest of the Body of Christ.

The man I was working with was right. “The Body of Christ” is an old phrase and sometimes it fails to fire the imagination. Gathering to worship and pray is sometimes hard to see as God alive in the world. So, while the Body of Christ that we are all a part of is doing heroic, godly work this morning, and while we are all paying attention to how *our* hands are digging out rubble, and *our* arms are lifting sacks of food, and *our* hearts are comforting orphans, let me remind you that this is the same body that will live in God’s

creation when the headlines change. Let this time remind you that you were created to be more than a cut-off lifeless part of what was intended to be the Body of Christ.

You still get to be part of the body when nothing dramatic is going on.

In the coming weeks we, in this congregation, will talk about how to use all of the different gifts we have as we emphasize stewardship. The Season of Lent begins next month with an emphasis on study, discipline, and acts of love. That will be followed by Easter and a celebration of new life. You could invite someone to worship here. Right now, in this congregation, we need people to serve on the planning boards of Youth and Family, Fellowship, Stewardship, and Spiritual Life. The Board of Christian Education needs a chair. So many different gifts are needed, and every one indispensable. You are invited to live as the Body of Christ.

God is alive in the world. Right now, he is putting up a shelter in Haiti. Right now, the sun is starting to go down in Moscow, and God is keeping a women's center open. He will encourage members of his body to study and come to a deeper understanding of other denominations. He will encourage members to study and come to a deeper understanding of their own denomination. And next week he will still be here – singing, praying, preparing the elements for Holy Communion, offering money, teaching Sunday School, and making sure everyone has a bulletin. It's not always dramatic, but the Body of Christ needs all of its members.

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