

January 26, 2025

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

“One Body With Many Members”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This morning in some way or another you decided to go to church. You said to yourself: “I’m going to church.” Or, maybe you said: “I don’t want to go to church, but I’m going to go anyway,” and so here you are, and your pastors are glad you came.

The word “church” is often understood by us as a place - a building. But it really isn’t that at all. The Lutheran Confessions defines the church in the most simple way possible: “[the church] is namely, holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their shepherd.” There are no imposters, no false sheep, no unbelievers, and no hypocrites. There are only those who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus says in John 10:27-29, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”

Because the church consists of only those who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins we often say that the church is “invisible.” But don’t let that term fool you. While we cannot know who really believes, that doesn’t mean that we are unable to identify where the church is. We can identify the church of believers by her marks. We know that there are believers present wherever the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution, because only believers put up with the Word and sacraments.

The Word and sacraments are Jesus. Unbelievers have nothing to do with these. But believers want to see Jesus where he has said that he will be found until the end of time. You may or may not have thought about it this way but the truth was this: when you said that you wanted to go to church, you were actually saying, “I want to go see and receive Jesus and his gifts!” Hopefully, that’s why you really came to church this morning. You have truly arrived at church - in this building - despite the fact that there are probably weeds among the wheat, or goats among the sheep.

In our epistle lesson for this morning, the apostle Paul describes the fellowship of believers as **One Body With Many Members**. He writes: “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.” This is an amazing thought and we hardly ever think of the church this way. And it ties in beautifully with what we said about baptism a couple of Sundays ago. You might recall that I said that our baptism has united us to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Since Jesus died for us, when we are touched by him in baptism, we also die to ourselves. I said that the burial of Jesus is the burial of the old you and me. And I said that in the resurrection of Jesus a new us emerges from his life so that our life is no longer ours, but is a new life that is thankfully lived in Jesus and for him.

In our epistle lesson for this morning, we read these words of Paul, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” There’s that expression again. We are one body - **One Body With Many Members** because we have all been baptized with the same baptism and have participated together in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus

our Savior. The body of Christ is composed of people who are attached to Christ because of his redeeming work and by means of the gospel and sacraments. This is a real participation in Jesus and the gift of forgiveness and heaven. The church of Christ is composed of people who show with their lips and in their lives that they have come under a new saving rule where heaven is their home. This saving rule marks our lives and makes us one with each other. Our identity is found in Jesus and our destination is one and the same. And while our various roads may be different in details, we have been brought together to be there for one another so that none will be lost.

The body of Christ is composed of individuals who are attached to one another in a genuine unity by the love of Jesus in his atoning sacrifice for our sins. Love is the fulfilling of the law, that is, it creates a right relationship with God and each other. Jesus has so extraordinarily loved us in the cross and empty tomb that when it is received by faith we are stirred up to love him and one another. And this love, that we have for one another, is a desire to sacrifice ourselves in whatever way may be necessary so that we all together make it to heaven. Whatever we do we for one another - we do it to keep one another in the forgiveness of sins and headed toward the destination of heaven.

Paul uses an outstanding illustration of this so that we may understand. He says that the church is the body of Christ and we are many members of that one body. Some of us are feet and some of us are ears and eyes and noses. He says that God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose, as many parts, yet one body. He writes in verses 24b-27, "But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." In these words, the apostle Paul is describing Christian love that builds up and preserves the members of the church unto salvation. We have been put together for a reason. Paul says:

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." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

This is beautiful. Instead of nurturing divisiveness, the various parts of the body or organism should be anxiously and thoughtfully concerned about one another (1 Cor 12:25). As the various parts of the body are involved with one another, so is the church **One Body With Many Members**. Love builds up. Love sustains. Love keeps others clean. All of us are connected to each other by virtue of our baptism, for as Paul writes in Romans 12:5, "we are members of one another." So, we do care for each other and are interested in the welfare of one another. This means that we are not merely going to church for ourselves to receive the gospel and sacraments, but we are presenting ourselves to one another for service.

Paul adds a final observation about the body in 12:26, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” Whenever one part of the body is suffering, that affects the person’s whole sense of well-being. A toothache makes one feel miserable all over. The philosopher Plato remarked that “when one’s finger is hurt, one does not really mean, ‘My finger is in pain,’ but ‘I have a pain in my finger.’” And the presence of pain causes the whole body to react, releasing adrenaline. When a runner has an inflamed Achilles tendon or a single pulled muscle in the calf, even if the rest of his body yearns for exercise, he must wait until the one injury is healed.

On the other hand, when a part of the body that has been suffering finds relief, the whole body shares that sense of relief. And when a part of the body is honored (“you have a beautiful smile”), the whole person basks in the glow of the compliment. What Paul is observing about the facts of our physical experience, should be characteristic of our life within the church. The Christian should “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15).” We should not be indifferent to the welfare of others but should seek and rejoice in the good of all.

This is what Christ did for us. He is the head of the body and shows these things for what they really are when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. He suffered our sufferings. He died our death. He rose that we might live. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. In the same way, if one member suffers, all suffer together, and if one member is honored, all rejoice together. That is what it means to be **One Body With Many Members!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott