

Luke 4:14-21     The Heavens Declare  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a  
Psalm 19  
January 27, 2019

“There is no ‘I’ in team.” “Together Everyone Achieves More.”

Both of these “team” cliches come from the world of sports. They refer to the truth that a group of people working together as a unit is more effective than a collection of individuals, acting independently.

The example of a team is very easy to understand because of the popularity of sports in our culture; football, basketball, and baseball. For those who are disinclined to sports, music also illustrates the same truth whether it be a smaller ensemble like a rock and roll band, or a symphony orchestra accompanied by a full concert choir. In either example, each part plays a different role and has different characteristics yet functions as a part of a single unit. The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

The truthfulness of this team principle is very similar and remarkably close to the idea of the church as the Body of Christ as expressed in 1 Corinthians 12.

In Corinth, Paul found divisions. There were the factions: Apollos, Peter, Paul, even a Jesus faction. And there were the spiritual gifts. For the people in

Corinth there were several mentioned by name: prophecy, tongues, wisdom, knowledge, faith, interpretation.

If I may say, the Christians in Corinth were behaving like children. They were not being childlike, which can be viewed in a positive way, but childish. Paul said as much in chapter 3 when he told them they were only ready for milk, not solid food.

Frankly, that has been an appropriate criticism of Christians ever since; largely pre-occupied with their own experiences, their own spiritual health, their own needs.

The Body of Christ

What Paul gave them was a reference to a miracle. He used the metaphor of the body; one unit, many parts. Paul writes, “all these are the work of one and the same Spirit.” It is a powerful image.

He goes to some length to tell them what should be obvious. He explains the metaphor to make sure they get it. He says that the foot is not less a part of the body because it is not a hand, nor an ear because it is not an eye. He even envisions the absurd, abstract art, idea of the whole body as an eye or an ear.

The body is a miracle, all the parts assembled together in a way that makes an integrated whole. Paul goes on

to speak of the way the parts of the body are inter-dependent, of the less presentable being given greater attention, about how there is no division in the body, how if one part is in pain, the whole body is in pain. If one part is honored, the whole rejoices.

And then he delivers the punch line; *“now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

### My Temptation

The temptation for me is to always focus on the implications of the many parts, the many differences that divide people from one another. There is great diversity in such a wide variety of ways.

My temptation is to always preach about acceptance instead of rejection, inclusion instead of exclusion, all based on this team principle, this idea that we are all one body. At the very least we could see that Paul is telling us not to take ourselves so seriously and to get off each others backs about things.

But there *are* other possibilities. For instance, in the phrase, “you are the body of Christ,” we could lay focus on the term, “Christ,” rather than the word, “body.” So let us think about what it means that we are *Christ’s* body.

The term, “Body of Christ,” is Eucharistic, that is, it raises images the Lord’s Supper. And the Lord’s

Supper is a ritual that presents Christ’s body in terms of its brokenness on the cross, and its magnificence in the Resurrection. We are the body of Christ, broken and shed, raised to new life, which is the meaning of our baptism.

The image of Jesus on the cross, taking upon himself the world’s sinfulness and brokenness, that is who *we* are. The image of Christ raised in new life, with the lingering marks of the cross on his body, the wounds in his hands and feet and side, that is who *we* are.

There are, of course, other images: that of Jesus standing on a hill or in a boat just off shore, teaching the people the good news of God’s Kingdom; the image of Jesus going off by himself to pray, and being tempted; the picture of him sifting through the crowds bringing health to everyone who touched him; the picture of his compassion when he could see how beaten down the people were, lost, shiftless, like sheep without a shepherd. We are the body of Christ, all of us.

The world is still in pain and we are a part of its pain. Might we also be a part of it’s healing? It’s redemption? Listen again to the words Jesus spoke when he went into the synagogue, that is, the church, for the first time after he had been baptized; he read from the Prophet Isaiah,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

To say that we are Christ's body means we share this legacy, that we have the same purpose, to take upon us the world's sin, not individually, not even just one group here or there, but as the whole bustling diverse set of peoples and groups and movements and institutions; the world's sin, its brokenness, its blindness, its captivity, for the sake of our healing, and the world's. We are Christ's body.

What a difficult and challenging idea. Mostly it seems that we fail. The body is divided. The tension is insufferable. Christians have become well-versed in the art of using words like daggers to cut each other up with. What a beaten up body we are. If we could only learn the lesson of the team, and learn to value those who seem to be antagonists, because they are a part of the body, too, and it is Christ's body.

But don't be discouraged, because even if, like the Israelites whose kingdoms were conquered, we can't see how there will be a better day, we also see Christ's victory so meaningfully that we can join with the psalmist, who looked at the tragedy of his world and broke forth in praise and adoration:

The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world. . . .  
The law of the Lord is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.  
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.  
The precepts of the Lord are right,  
giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the Lord are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.  
The fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever.  
The decrees of the Lord are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.  
They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold . . . ;  
May these words of my mouth and this meditation of  
my heart be pleasing in your sight,  
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

I do not know what is happening in your heart and life, what it is that might attract you to faith in Christ; And I do not have the answers to the world's pressing needs, but I am confident that we can make this our prayer, “May the words of our mouth, the meditations of our hearts, may they be pleasing in your sight, O Lord. We are Christ's body.

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