

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a    Third Sunday after Epiphany    January 25, 1998

*12For 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. 13For 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. 14Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15If 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. 16And 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. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21The 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.” 22On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and 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; 24whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

*27Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28And 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. 29Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31But strive for the greater gifts.*

In some families great wisdom is passed on from one generation to another. Great thoughts about the meaning of life are spoken from mother to son to son's son, to son's son's daughter. At least I think that is how it should be. But in my family the only piece of wisdom that I recall is of a more common sort. “If your feet hurt, you hurt all over.” My mother told me her mother had spoken this truth. And then she to me. Unfortunately I failed to impress this truth on my children.

“If your feet hurt you hurt all over.”

Paul could have written it. This certainly fits with what he was saying. Every part of our body is connected to the whole body. Every part needs every other part - eyes need the feet - feet need the ears. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. Nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. If one part of the body suffers all parts of the body suffer with it.

“If your feet hurt, you hurt all over” kind of captures it.

So today I want you all to remember what my grandmother taught. Keep it in your hearts and minds. “If your feet hurt, you hurt all over.”

Now for my mother that wisdom was about buying shoes that fit well. She wanted to impress upon her son that we needed to take the time to try on lots of pairs of shoes in the shoe store and not rush through shoe shopping.

Sometimes in the body of Christ, the church, a lot of time is spent trying on things as well. Visitors come and visit many times looking for the right fit. They come looking for a congregation that will meet their needs.

Sometimes in the church there has been an emphasis on making sure the new members who join the church are measured and fitted as well. Becoming a member is a long and complicated process, with many hurdles to jump so that not just anyone can belong. Especially important has been the concern that new members be morally worthy of Christ.

I think at Corinth there was some sense in that church that all the members were not part of one body. So Paul wrote to them: *"If the foot should 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."* Hands and feet are not the same, but both are essential, both members of one body.

Everything that Paul has to say is collected in one verse: *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

Whether you feel that you really belong or not, you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Whether you think that this one or that one really belongs, they are members of the body of Christ, no more expendable than your own hand is expendable to you.

When I look out and see you right now, I see people who belong together in Christ. God is able to bless you in Christ in his body. Whoever you are, whatever sins and hopes and dreams and fears you bring with you in this body, Christ is able to bless you and use you and bless others through you in this body. The only barrier is your believing that you really don't belong, or that God has no work for you, or that not even God can give you growth. But when you are open to the Holy Spirit working in you to make you new, then in this body miracles happen - the very miracles Jesus announced in that synagogue in Nazareth.

The poor hear good news, whatever their poverty.

The captives are freed, in Christ freed from fear, freed from anxiety, freed from hopelessness.

The blind see as they have never seen before, Christ, the light gives them sight.

The oppressed receive freedom beyond their hopes, the whole body is at work to bear their burden with them.

I have seen these things happen in this body of Christ, even when I myself did not expect new beginnings.

But it does not happen overnight. If I break a bone in my foot, the process of healing takes time - and care. I need to adjust my way of moving about to protect that bone, no longer walking on it for a time so that it can knit together.

And often healing does not happen when we remain alone. A broken foot needs arms and hands to work the crutches so that the weight can be kept off the foot for a time. If the other foot refuses help, the bone will never heal properly. And the whole body will suffer.

You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.

You are not here just for yourself. You belong to Christ. In his body you belong to one another.

If I offend you, it is not only my relationship with you that is harmed, but the whole body. When there is reconciliation, when I apologize and you forgive, the whole body is blessed. The same is true with every relationship that you have with every other member of this body.

So remember my grandmother's wisdom. "If your feet hurt, you hurt all over." When another person hurts you, when you hurt another, remember my grandmother's wisdom. And know that healing power of Christ's body is greater than sin, greater than evil, greater than death. For our Lord in his body continues to conquer every enemy as he prepares his body for eternity.