

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 4th Sunday After Epiphany, January 31, 2016

Keeping the Body of Christ Healthy

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

January 31, 2016

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Last Sunday I talked about how it came to pass that I entered the ministry --- God called me to do it --- of that I am 100% certain. God has a role for each and every one of us but we have to individually recognize what that role is.

Our scripture reading last week pointed out that there are different kinds of service to the Lord for each of us. The Holy Spirit leads us to discern what that service is and often we do what the Spirit tells us to do without even realizing that the Spirit is guiding us.

Today's scripture reading from 1 Corinthians explains this with the analogy of the human body and its many parts and how those parts work together and are dependent upon each other. Yet each part of the body is unique. A hand is not a foot or an ear or an eye. They all operate differently yet each is vital to the proper operation of the body.

Paul's analogy is to the body of Christ, the church. The church is not a homogeneous entity. Each member is unique yet for the church to function and do the work of the Lord each member has a specific, but different, role to play.

Consider an athletic team and how it functions. Super Bowl is coming up in two weeks. Each of the two teams must function smoothly and effectively if they hope to win. The coach is the one who guides the team, the quarterback is the coordinator of the plays, the center must snap the ball properly, the halfbacks, fullbacks, and the other team members all have different roles to play – each of the eleven team members who are on the field at any given time has a role and those roles are different, yet each one must perform their role or the team will not be successful.

The same is true of any church. The congregation is a team and the success of the team depends upon how well each member of the congregation fulfills his or her role.

In our scripture reading, Paul emphasizes the diversity of the parts of the human body and their mutual interdependence. Paul, by analogy, is stating that every member

of the body of Christ is called upon to contribute to the peace and unity of the body. Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people, by virtue of their baptism, became parts of the body of Christ.

Paul points out that diversity is necessary for the parts of the body of Christ to be the body. No one is dispensable or insignificant and no one can stand alone apart from the body.

I have met people who say that they don't need the church to be a Christian. They can worship and get along just fine by themselves. Can they?

I don't think so.

Consider the analogy with the human body. No part can claim to go it alone. A nose without a head would have no function. It could do nothing. The same is true of a hand without an arm or a foot without a leg. In the words of James Brashler¹, *"God, not nature, has given each part of the body an essential function. To ignore, devalue, or exclude a member of the body is to fly in the face of God's design for the church."*

"With a clever play on words Paul reminds [us] ... that those parts of the body that people consider weak, less honorable, or less respectable are precisely the part of the body that are indispensable, more honorably clothed, and treated with more respect. His main point is that the intrinsic value of each member of the body means that every member must care deeply about every other member ... The mutual interdependence of all part of the body rules out any divisiveness that undermines the unity of the body."

Churches in the PC(USA) and in every other denomination have split apart because of dissention --- because members have forgotten that they are dependent upon each other to do the work of the Lord. These people have forgotten Paul's message. Paul was addressing dissention in the church at Corinth but his message was meant for all congregations everywhere.

Any congregation which overlooks Paul's message will inevitably have difficulty.

I marvel at the small congregation here at Conley Memorial and how this congregation functions as a part of the body of Christ. Everyone participates fully to the extent they are able.

John Childers does a phenomenal job as Clerk of Session; Monica, and Clara before her, ably handles the functions of the Treasurer; Pat takes the bull by the horns

and masterfully organizes the annual yard sale; Martha provides wonderful food to feed our bodies and music to feed our souls; Margaret does a yoeman's job of keeping the church neat and clean; Bob and Lucille prepare communion each month; Daniel pitches in with the maintenance items as needed, Jon Bledsoe and Rick lend a hand with the yard sale; John Ray diligently makes sure that the lights are turned off after church; all of you pitch in on any task which needs to be done with energy and enthusiasm. No one complains or opts out of whatever we attempt to do; and little Hunter brings us joy with her smiles and antics.

Are we as diverse as we might like to be? I'd say yes but we are only one deep at each position. We need to build this congregation if we are to continue to be an effective part of the body of Christ. If we have a weakness, that is where it lies. Each person here needs to take the initiative to reach out to others --- to tell them what a wonderful congregation this is --- why you are a member of Conley Memorial --- and why they should become a member of this energetic part of the body of Christ.

If we lose out quarterback, our fullback, our field goal kicker, our coach, or any other part of our team we won't be able to continue to be successful.

Reach out. Find those people who think that they can go it alone and show them that the body of Christ is not one member, but many.

Amen.

1. James Brasher, "One Body, Many Members" Presbyterian Outlook, April 27, 2015