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We Are the Body of Christ
1 Corinthians 12:12-22, 26-27, Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring **good news** to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim **release** to the captives
and **recovery of sight** to the blind,
to set **free those who are oppressed,***

*¹⁹ to **proclaim the year** of the Lord’s favor.”*

*²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “**Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**”]*

¹² 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. ¹³ For 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.

*¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If 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. ¹⁶ And 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. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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.” ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²⁶ **If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.** ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

These are 2 powerful passages about following Jesus.

One is Jesus' first sermon in Luke 4.

It's Jesus' ***mission statement***—saying what he will do as Messiah.

The second is ***Paul's description of OUR mission***—
to be a part of the body of Christ, the church.

I wonder—do YOU have a mission statement, for your LIFE?

My Dad had a ***saying***.

Do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason.

It was kind of like a ***mission*** statement.

What is ***YOUR mission statement?***

And what is ***OURS, as a church?***

A mission statement is about what you are CALLED to do.

And for Christians, it's about ***how we are called to JOIN God's work in the world.***

Jesus's first sermon lays this out—for us to follow, centuries later!

In 1 Corinthians 12, we hear that ***our mission involves using our gifts***
in the body of Christ, the church.

Each gift, for the common good.

Luke 4 is ***Jesus's mission statement***, from the beginning of his ministry.

And it's not anything new, Jesus is reading from ***Isaiah***.

But, it's never been ***embodied*** before.

So imagine the ***scene***: The ***congregation includes Jesus's friends*** and family--
They know him.

What Jesus says and does, is very ***simple***,

And yet revolutionary.

He is handed the scroll of Isaiah, and he finds ***Isaiah 61:1-2a***.

(***Jesus omits the rest of verse 2, about God's vengeance***).

Then Jesus reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. ... proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, .. to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he says:

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In other words, this is *who I am and what I will do*.
That is his sermon.

He's saying: *I am the Messiah*, the Savior you've been expecting.
 And I've come to bring *good news, release, sight, freedom*, and *new beginnings!*
 And you know what?
 It *didn't go over very well*.

The congregation *doesn't know him as* the Messiah!
 They know him as Mary and Joseph's son, a carpenter.
 So even though his sermon is **GOOD** news—he is REJECTED!
 His *first* sermon in Nazareth is his *last* sermon there.

Jesus even *predicts how they will reject* him, right before they do:
 He says *a prophet is not accepted* in his hometown...
 Then, in verse 29 we read:
The people got up, drove him out of town, and led him to the brow of the hill .. so that they might hurl him off the cliff.
But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Jesus told them his *mission*,
 And it wasn't what they expected, so they rejected him!

The question for us is, what's **OUR mission?**
 And—how does it *compare* to his?
 And are we willing to **STICK with it**, even when times are tough for us?

Remember the old adage **W.W.J.D.—What Would Jesus Do?**
 Isn't that still a *great question?*
 What **WOULD** Jesus do, today?
 With what is happening all around us?

And how are we involved with what God is doing?
 By naming us *the body OF CHRIST*, Paul is saying we should *imitate Jesus...*
WE are to identify with the marginalized, serve others, reject injustice...
 We are to bring the *good news*, and proclaim *release*.
 We are help *bring sight*, and *freedom*,
 And the year of God's favor, AKA a *new beginning* for those who need it!

A mission statement is not just what *we WANT to do*---
 A true mission for a Christian is what *God CALLS us to do!*
 And how *God wants to act THROUGH us.*

So--what is that for YOU? And what is that for US?

Luke 4 says: *Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee...*
 and then in the Isaiah reading Jesus says,
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me!

So, what if the *Holy Spirit* helps us find *our mission*?
 The Holy Spirit is certainly *central* to Jesus' mission—
It descends upon him like a dove at his *baptism*,
 It *leads him* to the desert for temptation,
 Then, in Nazareth, *Jesus is filled with the Spirit to preach.*

The Holy Spirit IS *key* to finding our mission.
 It's no accident that *Jesus talks about being filled with the Spirit.*

Paul too—talks about the Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 12 he says, we have all been given gifts—*from the Spirit.*
 And each gift of the Spirit is for the common good!
In other words, the Spirit shows us what to do—today!

So how do we tap into that Spirit?

We pray.

We know that Jesus was a person of prayer, Paul was too.
 The question is, *are WE?*
 Are we asking the *Spirit to show us our mission*, today?

Prayer is the ONLY way we can know what part we play,
 And what we are called to do as Jesus-followers.

You know, there's a reason that Paul uses the *BODY*
as the metaphor for the church.

The *human body has* 206 bones, 639 muscles, 6 pounds of skin,
 It has veins, arteries, blood, ligaments, cartilage, fat, and water.
 It is one of the most complex systems on earth!
 Every time we move or take a breath
 there are *hundreds of parts working together* to make it happen!

So of course, Paul uses the BODY to talk about the church—
because *each one of us is part of this complex system!*
And we ALL have an essential part to play for the common good.

The church is not a religious organization—it is a *living ORGANISM*.
It is literally the way that Jesus is known in the world today.
Think about that.
We are a witness—to the world.
The way we speak and act—people see that.

In the words of Teresa of Avila, we are the *hands and feet of Jesus today*.
She said... “Christ has no body now, but yours....”

The church is this living body--
And yet, most people are not involved in a church.
Which begs the question: *what are WE doing,*
to invite and welcome our neighbors into the body of Christ?

Because, being a part of a church is *ESSENTIAL to our faith*—not optional.
And, if we look at Paul’s words,
and Jesus’ example with the disciples,
we see that there is no such thing as *belonging, without participating*.

When we belong to the body of Christ,
we have a *responsibility to be ACTIVE* in it.
And just like the human body doesn’t work well when one part stops,
so the body of Christ doesn’t function well when some parts are not working!
In Paul’s words, *we cannot say “I have no need of you”*.
And, there are NO ‘lesser’ parts of the body.

Just like our bodies can’t run on a single part, neither can the church.
And all the different gifts---are *gifts from the same Holy Spirit*.
The body has an *amazing DIVERSITY*—which is itself a gift.

Different members contribute in different ways,
Some are better at listening, speaking, singing, serving,
some serve best behind the scenes, others out front.
And ALL are essential.

*I wonder, what has God called YOU to do, as a ‘member’ of the body of Christ?
And what about in our greater community?
What is YOUR mission?
How is God calling you to act? And speak?*

Karoline Lewis of *workingpreacher.org* says that when we read that we are all ‘members’ of the body of Christ, we tend to think of **official membership**. But in reality, it’s something much **deeper**.

*Being a member of the body of Christ means an absolute, ..
conjoining of one with the other, a sister or brother in Christ.
She says if we exist in **division**, that’s like **dismemberment** of a body....
Karoline Lewis, *workingpreacher.org*, Jan 24, 2010.*

In other words, we NEED each other.
We need the differences, the diversity, the different gifts.
The different opinions.
Different isn’t bad, it’s different.

When Jesus described his mission, people saw it as different.
And unfortunately, many rejected him, and his mission.

***When we look at people in the body of Christ
And see differences and diversity as bad,
We can be tempted to reject one another.***
The same way we can be tempted to reject people who are different
Outside of the church.

Karoline Lewis writes about **embracing diversity**, and what it meant to her.
She writes:
*On a theological, cultural, historical level, I cannot help but hear this portion of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians without thinking about my recent visit to the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.
When we operate from a place and perspective that sees **difference as primarily NEGATIVE**, to what extent does the criteria for difference become an unending search for the need to find difference?
She writes of what she saw in the museum:
Differentiation was itemized to the size of one’s nose, the color of one’s eyes, or the shape of one’s ears.*

*Any variation from “the” standard features of the Aryan race was considered an anomaly at best, abhorrent at worst, and in the end, the criterion for experimentation, sterilization, and extermination. While this may sound like a hyperbolic example, **the propensity of humanity to think in categories of incongruities, irregularities, and inconsistencies exposes our extraordinary need for abundant FORGIVENESS***

*and our need to claim over and over again our **UNITY in Christ.***

Karoline Lewis, workingpreacher.org, Jan 24, 2010.

We are always tempted to categorize people.

And see ***differences as bad, instead of just different.***

It can be tempting to see diversity as bad.

But we learn through Jesus Christ that diversity

Can be a source of true unity.

We were created by God to be different.

Just like a body cannot exist as all hands or big toes,

We cannot truly exist, and thrive, if we are all the same.

This week—let us think about that.

And about our mission.

What has the Spirit called us to do and be?

How can we follow God’s call?

And who in the body needs our appreciation? And cooperation?

How can we thank someone—today?

How can we work together in new ways?

And who needs to be welcomed into this body of Christ, the church?

How will we ***invite*** them?

And ***bring them into community?***

Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel today:

We are the body of Christ the church.

We have been called to bring good news, freedom, sight, and new beginnings.

We each have a part to play, and gifts for the common good.

May God guide us into our mission.

And for this, all God’s people can say together, Amen.