

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

America has often been called a melting pot or a salad bowl. You know what that implies? Our culture consists of so many different people, so many different ethnicities, different backgrounds, different personalities. No two people will ever be completely alike. And yet, all of these diverse people form one nation, one country, the United States.

Individuals, each different, but each one is an essential part of our country, necessary, important for our country to work, to survive, to thrive. We are all united in another way, too. We are part of the body of Christ. And every one of us is essential, vital to it.

Paul had to make that point to the Corinthian believers. If you remember last Sunday, in our sermon text, Paul had been asked by the Corinthian believers to talk about spiritual gifts, the talents and abilities God had given them to serve God, to give glory to him, which would have included using those gifts in the church.

So we discussed finding our own spiritual gifts to do the same here, to use those talents and abilities the Holy Spirit gives us to glorify him in our lives, and, especially, in our church.

Well, this morning, Paul carries on that conversation with our verses here, which actually follow right on the heels of last week. He anticipates the question that the Corinthians would likely ask as a follow-up to his list of various spiritual gifts and his encouragement to use them. It may be the same question you asked in your head last week as we talked about Jesus giving us the energy to use the spiritual gifts he's given us. The question "Why?" "I have these spiritual gifts, but why do I use them? Why should I use them?"

Paul's answer? The first verse and the last verse we have this morning. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

With those beginning words, Paul carries on an extended metaphor, a neat picture, very logical in thinking, comparing the human body to the Christian church. The body of Christ, or in this case, the Corinthian church, consisted of many members, every one of them different in their gifts, in their talents, in their abilities, just like the human body consists of different members, different body parts, each with a different function.

Now, in this instance, could it have been that there were Corinthians who felt since they didn't have the big, popular gifts, like being able to speak in tongues, or having the gifts of healing, or being able to prophesy, so they weren't really that important to the church? Possibly.

Yet, that didn't give them the grounds to not use what seemingly inferior or unimportant gifts they did have. Just think how ridiculous it would be if the foot should say enviously that it was not a part of the body because it wasn't the hand (which it considered to be a more important member), or the ear should say enviously that it was not a part of the body because it was not the eye (which it considered to be a more important member).

They couldn't all be hands. They couldn't all be eyes. A body full of only eyes could probably see everything, but it couldn't do anything else. They couldn't all have the same gift, otherwise the body just wouldn't be able to function.

All the believers were indispensable. No matter what their spiritual gifts, the body of Christ, the church, could not do without them. Same is true with the human body. I mean, over the years, people have thought certain body parts, like your tonsils or your appendix are worthless, don't have a purpose, are expendable. But over time, studies have shown some value to these members, that every body part has a use. So it was with the believers in the Corinthian church.

So it is within our church, with you and me. Every one of you is a body part of this church. Every one of you is a member of the body of Christ. And as such, you have a function.

Do you know what your function is? Are you one of those body parts that have a variety of functions, such as singing in the choir, ushering, serving on the outreach team, helping plan church activities, mowing the church lawn, along with a list of other ways you serve here? There are a few of those members out there.

Are you a body part, like the eye, who has one function, but you do it well, like devoting all your time to church council, or signing up monthly to bring treats, or sharing your love for God's Word week after week as you teach those precious truths to the Sunday School children? We have those here as well.

Or...maybe I didn't describe you at all. Maybe you're the body part, like some of these Corinthian believers, who have a spiritual gift, but either a) you're not using it here, or b) you feel it's not really that important, a pretty insignificant gift, so you're not using it here.

Do you know what happens when every part in your body is not functioning or at least functioning as it should? Well, that's when problems start to occur. That's when the body stops working, stops working as effectively as it can be.

I have this gift, I love to crunch numbers, I'm good at it, and I see our budget in disarray, but I won't help fix it. Now, I admit, my guilty pleasure is I like to do woodwork, I like to get my hands dirty, but I'm too busy to help out at church. God has blessed me with a beautiful voice. I could sing in the choir, but I'm too timid, they're too good, and I don't want to bring them down. I want to get involved here, but I can't do the big things, like play the organ or usher or help teach VBS, so I get discouraged from doing anything here.

When this happens, when attitudes surface, when the body parts aren't functioning, problems arise in the whole body. Paul writes, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it." So, when I'm not carrying my weight, not only am I suffering because I'm not being faithful with this trust, this gift given to me by God. No, the rest of the body suffers along with me.

You know why? They have the added weight. They have to try to make up for lost work. They get worn down trying to compensate for the space I'm leaving open. Like, if I can teach, whether it's Bible Class,

or Sunday School, but I won't do it, that means someone else has to, maybe someone else who's already got a full plate.

Now, I'll admit, if one part of the human body stops working, usually the other parts will just naturally start picking up the slack and compensating for the loss. But that's not what we're talking about here. That's not fair to the other members of the body of Christ. That's not what God expects of us.

On the other side of the coin, if I have this attitude, well, I'm doing what I can here, I'm using my gifts, but that other person might not be, but it's not for me to care about that, I've just got to worry about myself. The result is the same, the body suffers.

If a man dislocates his little toe, his whole body is wracked with pain, even though only a seemingly insignificant body part is involved. We cannot assign value to our body parts; they are all valuable. If one body part is in trouble, the rest of the body is concerned.

So it is with the body of Christ. Whatever our sinful reasons may be, selfishness, apathy, laziness, not being content with our gifts, jealousy of others, the whole body suffers. The whole body feels the pain.

Again, do you see what Paul writes in our last verse this morning? "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." Regardless of your function, regardless of whether you carry out your function or not, you are all members of the body of Christ. You are all valuable, vital members of the body of Christ.

Do you know what Christ's role is in the body? The book of Ephesians tells us, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body." Fittingly, Jesus is the head of the body.

He's the most important piece of the puzzle because without him, the rest of the body wouldn't be able to function. Without Jesus, we wouldn't even be a part of the body.

That wouldn't be good, but thankfully, that's not the case. Jesus wants us to be a part of his body, and by his perfect life, his substitutionary death on the cross, dying for our sins, and his glorious resurrection from the dead, he made it possible for us to be members of his body.

And by the miracle of baptism, we were joined to this body of Christ. Paul writes, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." By the waters of baptism, Jesus made us to "drink" the Holy Spirit, that is, he gave us saving faith in him. All of us, from different background, but by that one baptism, by the work of the Holy Spirit, by the forgiveness we receive from Jesus, we have been brought together into one body, the body of believers, the body of Christ.

You know, in the human body, God has arranged all the parts in strategically correct positions. The eyes, ears, arms, legs, etc., are all put together for maximum efficiency. The body was put together with a plan. The body of Christ has also been put together with a plan. God puts specific talents and gifts into the church to make it grow and prosper.

And at the head of it all? Jesus. Now, you know what the function of the head is, right. Or, more specifically, the organ the head houses, the brain. It controls the entire body. It causes the different parts of the body to function, to work.

That's Jesus. We've talked about how through baptism, Jesus has given us new life, a New Man. He is in control of that New Man. Jesus works in us and through us to function how he wants us to.

And Jesus is the motivating force behind us using our spiritual gifts. When you use your gift of encouragement, giving that to someone who's going through a rough time, Jesus is in control. The body is working. When you volunteer your time to do that might seem trivial, like helping put up or take down decorations at church, Jesus is in control. The body is working. When you find ways to use your spiritual gifts and talents, whatever they might be, so that you can give glory to God, Jesus is in control. The body is working.

Every part of the body of Christ is valuable. Every part of the body of Christ is wanted. Every part of the body of Christ is needed. I will tell you right now, I need you. This church needs you. The person sitting to your left, your right, in front, behind you needs you and needs your gifts. We are dependent on each other to make this body go and carry out the Lord's work.

As the human body must have diversity to work effectively as a whole, so the members of Christ's body have diverse gifts, and using them helps to accomplish Christ's goal, the work of the gospel. But we all have to properly exercise our gifts or effectively use our positions for the good of the whole body. With Jesus in control, we do.

And this is what we get to look forward to when the body is working and every part is functioning as it should. "If one part is honored, every part rejoices." We rejoice. We share in the happiness when God's work is done, when that work is accomplished, when that work is blessed.

Make no mistake, every one of us is different in our gifts, just like how every person in this country is different from each other. But we are blessed. Because of Jesus, we have been made a part of his body. Every one of us is vital to it. And Jesus, he's in control. He gives us gifts, he wants us to use them, and so function, and when we do, we rejoice. Amen.