

08/05/12 Sermon
Ephesians 4:1–6, 11–16
Ascension Batavia

Greetings in Christ, grace and peace from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:1–6 (NKJV)

1–6 — 1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, **2** with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, **3** endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. ...

11–16 — 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **13** till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; **14** that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, **15** but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

ONE BODY – COORDINATED FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY

In Jesus name, who is our One Lord, the Head of the Body,

dear fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Maybe you are among the over 35 million viewers who have been tuning in each night to watch the United States compete in this year's olympic competitions. It is interesting to note how from one event to the next how much the physic and skill of the athlete might differ. From the sleeker, more compact build of the shorter, younger gymnast to the towering, massive, more mature build of an olympic shot putter, to a firm, stocky lower build of a sprinter, to the long, slender physic of a swimmer – the athletes train for months and years as their body becomes equipped and coordinated to the specific demands of their particular sport.

As I compare what those gymnasts do on the balance beam with what I am barely able to do on solid ground, I am reminded of how much training is needed teach the body to perform at such a high level. The muscles and brain must be coordinated as one at such a level that the athlete barely needs to make a conscious effort in order to illicit the right response.

As we consider this church alive by grace in Christ, we see this not as a stationary structure, but as Peter says, “you are living stones.” We are members of a living and

growing thing – that which Scripture refers to as the BODY of Christ. We are ONE BODY – COORDINATED for the work of ministry.

1. Joined as ONE

The athletes can train for countless hours as they prepare their bodies to perform at the highest level. Yet what is first necessary in order for them to do this? Maybe you've read or heard about this runner with two prosthetic legs. It is amazing that a runner can be equipped with artificial legs and compete at the olympic level. Yet whether prosthetic or real, the athlete still needs joints with all the necessary muscles and ligaments – and especially, a head with a brain to control all these functions. To be ONE BODY – we must first be **joined as ONE**.

(**v.4-6**). The unity of the Spirit is what joins us together into ONE BODY. The Spirit is the unseen ligaments of God's creation, the cells, the blood coursing through the veins – the life which joins us all together. **1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV) – 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**

What might have happened so many years ago for you, perhaps just a baby, two days old, has joined you as ONE to this body of believers today – even those he will not meet until heaven. Through the work of the Spirit, your baptism has joined you to this ONE body of the Holy Christian Church.

There is nothing you need to do or could possibly do to make real what God has already given you. In chapter 1 we read of how God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.” And chapter 2 – “you He made alive who were dead in trespasses.” “You are no longer strangers ... but members of the household of God.”

This is why Paul can definitively say, among the Body of believers, there is indeed ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism; and ONE God. But you say, what a minute, hold on now. How can you say there is just ONE faith. As we look around us it seems anything but. Even within so-called Lutheranism, we find some seminaries that teach that the resurrection of Christ was a myth. How can you say there is ONE faith when there are so many different denominations and differences throughout Christianity?

One of the confessional writings I have been referencing in studies with Allan is the Defense of the Augsburg Confession ... we read, “Wherefore we hold according to the Scriptures that the Church, properly so called is the congregation of saints (of those here and there in the world), who truly believe the gospel of Christ and have the Holy Spirit.” (Apol. Art. VII, 28; Triglot, p. 237). This is something that cannot be seen with the eye. It is not found on Church rosters. It is something that resides in the hearts of the elect.

We are joined as ONE through this invisible gift of God. As we teach in the explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed, “the Holy Spirit ... sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” There is only ONE faith and it rests in the revealed truth of this ONE God and Father of all who has given up His only Son to redeem us from every sin and place us under the service and rule of our ONE Lord, Jesus Christ.

We are coordinated perfectly. God has given us the gift to perform at the highest level: His righteousness. Yet the performance is not our own, but we are joined to Him who has perfectly performed every point of the law to preserve and protect us from eternal condemnation. Without this coordination to Christ, we would never be able to carry out the work of ministry. We would be like Congress, a mess of different voices and opinions, sometimes conceding, sometimes contending, but getting hardly anything done. But God through His word has united us under ONE Lord. He has given us the forgiveness of sins, and His Spirit to discover and know the ONE faith as revealed in Scripture.

This is the objective truth of our calling: ONE BODY – Coordinated perfectly, JOINED as ONE.

2. Walking as ONE

I forget sometimes how much of a challenge it is for a baby to progress from crawling to toddling. This is perhaps a greater feat than the track and field runner clearing hurdle after hurdle. Yet it is only the beginning of this child's growth and progress toward walking and eventually running. He has all the necessary tools within him to do this. His body is joined as ONE, yet he still has to learn balance before he begins walking.

(v.1) As we as Christians grow together, we need to learn this balance. It is not that we do not have all the necessary parts to do this. As we have said already, we are ONE body gathered under ONE faith – fellow citizens with the saints. Now we move on to consider how we begin to walk as ONE – that is, how we conduct ourselves among each other. Our walk should be an outward reflection of the inward gift. What we have just discussed being invisible – membership in the Holy Christian Church among all believers, now is applied to our visible relationships with each other. As ONE BODY, we should be **WALKING as ONE**.

(v.2) One of the greatest enemies of the Church can be ourselves. The Apostle wrote also to the congregation in Corinth, **1 Corinthians 3:3 (NKJV) – 3 For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**

He called them babes in Christ. This was because they, as a visible church, were still toddlers. Not able to balance themselves and walk as ONE.

We are no different. Can we even get through a day without setting our own desires above others'? Where we should love others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, we more often love them only as much as we think they deserve. Many times, we are so consumed with our own troubles, that we excuse ourselves from a multitude of sins. I am excused for that rude and mean response because they are interrupting what I am doing. Don't they see I am busy! OR I am excused for thinking those hateful thoughts, because I know he or she is thinking the same about me. OR I am excused for holding a grudge because I deserve an apology first.

Philippians 2:3,5,10 (NKJV) – 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ... 5

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... who humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Consider how Jesus was lowly and gentle ... how He, God of heaven and earth, subjected became obedient and lowly. Rather than accusing you of sin, He was bearing your sins in His own body on the tree –

Thank the Lord that our ability to walk worthy does not precede or determine our calling. The calling has come first, so that we know the love of God which has loved you and sent His Son to be the payment for all your sins. With this in our mind we find the balance needed to walk together as ONE.

If you have ever tried to walk the curb or get up on the balance beam, you recognize that for every teeter there must be a totter. To balance, you need to coordinate and compensate. Too much one way, means more the other. And so we teeter and totter in this walk together, yet are balanced in the unity of the ONE true faith.

v.4 – **“Endeavoring to keep, to protect, to guard the unity.”** What a precious treasure is ours. The Word has given us the surest of all salvations. We are ONE BODY with all believers destined for heaven. Shall we not protect, guard and treasure this unity?

This is where so much of the evangelical Christianity has seemed to go wrong. They have focused not preserving the UNITY that God has created through His Word. Rather so many focus on creating this unity as if it is something man could bring about. This is often referred to as the ecumenical movement (the “universal” movement). It is a fundamental belief that the unity of the Spirit is something we have to achieve by uniting all denominations, all churches under one super church. But at what cost?

We admit there is a unity in that concept: they do strive for a united church, even as the Roman Church refers to themselves as the “Catholic” Church, that is the “universal” Church, suggesting that the unity of the Spirit is found in external church membership.

“If you love Me, you’ll keep my commandments” Jesus said.

We are called to endeavor to keep the unity, not to create it by external membership – to guard and treasure outwardly what God has given us inwardly – the ONE faith in Jesus Christ.

(v.11–14) Christ has given this gift of pastors and teachers in order to prepare you for this united walk in the work of ministry. He is coordinating the Body through a called pastor, literally “shepherd,” to care for your spiritual needs of the flock so that you can, in turn, care for the needs of others. This work of ministry belongs not to the pastors or professors, it is yours – the building up of the body cannot be done by a few, but is the work of all.

That is why it is up to you to test what your church and pastor are teachers – for “many false teachers have gone out” God says. Those who would blow your sails off course, who though they may even appear to have good intentions, would carry you about with discord in teaching, with confusion of your confession, and tampering with the truth. We find the solid anchor in Christ and His Word.

1 Corinthians 1:10 (NKJV) — 10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

As ONE BODY, let us walk as ONE.

3. Growing as ONE

Perhaps you have watched these rowing competitions in the Olympics. They always seat a coach at the bow of the boat. This coach is trying to keep everyone coordinated. Whoever has the most coordinated rowers will likely win the race.

(v.15,16) We are UNITED under ONE “HEAD” coach. So often we forget this. By nature we tend to place ourselves at the head. Yeah, Christ is part of the body, but for a time we set ourselves a top, to coach, to dictate, and to tell people what’s right and what’s wrong.

This is an ever growing danger, especially in a confessionally minded church. A person can grow up studying the Bible, but never really grow up. A person can have all the answers, get 100% on the final exam, and if he has not love, as Paul says, “he becomes sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). You can be exactly right in your confession and actually be hindering the growth of the BODY. Any time we tell someone else they are wrong or living in sin simply to declare ourselves right – whether we really are right or not – we fail to let Christ be head and to grow into Him.

As ONE BODY, we grow as ONE. – v.15, by SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.

A church will almost always have a wide array of growth and maturity in the Christian faith. Yet God sees this not so much as one faith being greater and another lesser – but He sees His ONE BODY growing together. The foot serves the purpose of holding up the whole body as it walks, yet when we fall, it is not the foot that lifts us up, but the hand. We don’t leave a member behind, for we are all attached, GROWING as ONE.

Children can be healthy and growing physically, they can be very flexible, but still they are not mature. Think of the mental pressures of competing in an Olympics at age 16! Yet many of these have been trained to handle the pressure and not let it distract them as their body works together to function to its fullest.

Think of the pressures Christ faced when He was called upon to face temptation for us, to die in perfect love for the sins of His enemies. Yet He performed flawlessly – perfect mental and spiritual execution – perfect love. He has given all this to us – His perfect performance is ours. We have the mind of Christ which has handled ever trial, every test, every temptation, and is able to overcome. Let us find that maturity, functioning at the highest level – COORDINATED in, with, and under the Head – ONE BODY – Joined as ONE, Walking as ONE, Growing as ONE. Amen.