

Grace and peace from God our Father and all joy to you in the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:2,9,10) Amen.

We gather in the presence of God to hear His Word,

**1 Corinthians 12:12–31a (NKJV)** — **12** For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. **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. **14** For in fact the body is not one member but many. **15** If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? **16** And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? **18** But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. **19** And if they were all one member, where would the body be? **20** But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. **21** And 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** No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. **23** And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, **24** but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, **25** that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. **26** And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. **27** Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. **28** And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. **29** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? **30** Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? **31** But earnestly desire the best gifts.

This is the word of the Lord.

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We now implore God the Holy Ghost for the true faith which we need the most, Lord have mercy. Amen.

<b>Members of Christ – Many, Yet One</b>
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In Jesus name, who is, who was, and who is to come, our Savior in flesh and in glory, dear fellow sinners declared righteous in Him,

When beginning a new job, it often doesn't take long to learn who you like and who you don't like. You learn ways to avoid the people you don't like, and to rub elbows

with the ones you have to like. In the end, its often all about finding ways to move up to the position you desire – each to its own, survival of the fittest.

This is not the Church. The Church is not about a bunch of cubicles where each individual is only concerned about getting their task done. The Church is the body of Christ. *12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

**We are members of Christ – MANY, YET ONE.**

How often do we begin to think like the world and act like the world? We forget that the Church is not a business; it is not an individual; it is not just me; it is not not me.

*15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?*

It would be easy to think that because I am not a Council member or voting member or communicant member than I am not really needed. Our sinful flesh will always think in such ways. Our flesh thinks things like: "I am less important so someone else can do it" ... "that's someone else's responsibility" ... "since I am the one that always does it, I must be more important than those other members who don't do anything." This is the thinking of cubicle world.

How ridiculous would it be for one part of your body to think another part of the body more or less important? How ridiculous for one part of your body to feel unneeded just because it does not have the same function as another part. We are not working in cubicles. We are MANY, yet we are ONE.

*17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?*

If the CLC were just the pastors, or Ascension Lutheran Church was only the 6 men on the Council, then we would all be in big trouble. It would be like your body only being able to speak, but not being able to see or hear or walk. There is no such thing as a more or less important – only different.

In fact we should think of the Church not in terms of external membership at all. We shouldn't think in terms of baptized member, communicant member, voting member. Having your name appear in our annual report today does not make you a member of Christ.

*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.*

All ages, man or woman, grown up or child, upper class, middle class, lower class, member of the Council, member of the Ladies group, member of Ascension Lutheran Church or not ... What joins you to Christ is the work of the Spirit; it cannot be seen with our eyes at all. This greatest of spiritual gifts was given to you at your baptism.

Yes, you little children are part of this. You have been baptized into Christ. Your parents do not bring you to church just because they couldn't find a babysitter. They bring you here because you too are joined to Jesus.

I'm sure some of you children can relate to being really thirsty. What do you do when you are really thirsty? Right, you ask for a drink. Now if your parents gave you sugary soda all the time, at every meal, how do you think your body would feel? We all come to church because we need something. Big and small alike, we come here because we are sinful. We live in an cubicle society which lives on sugar drinks. The world teaches us to think for self first. That's my toy. That's their responsibility.

These sins parch our throats. We thirst for righteousness. There is only once source to quench our longing for something truly good and pure. We need to receive the true life that comes from the Spirit and is given in word and sacrament. *"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:13-14)

Through baptism, your sins have been detached and buried in the grave. This washing of rebirth has cut off your sinful flesh, drowned it in repentance and faith; ... you have left the world itself. You are now a member of Christ and members of each other. We struggle through this sinful world not as loners, but together. We face weaknesses: anger, discontent, lust, lack of ability to stand up for what is good. We face dark and hidden secrets, sins that we would rather keep to ourselves. Christ did not die so that you would face these things alone. He joined you to the fellowship of the saints, to His own body where we conquer sin and death in His resurrection.

Together we gather in His presence, here, in the body of Christ, to drink of this Spirit together. We are joined in blessed fellowship, as ONE through the forgiveness of sins. God no longer sees many individual sins, rather He sees One: His beloved Son. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:27-28)

So as we look around today let us not see strangers. Don't see men and women, don't see grown ups and children. See Jesus. See us all joined to One Body.

**26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;**

Raise your hand if you've been sick in the last month or so. Now when you get a nasty chest cold, do you hear your head saying, 'boy, I'm glad that's not me.' Rather its often your head that suffers as much as any part.

So also our head, who is Christ, was not immune the suffering we have experienced. In fact this was His very work of salvation – to one of us, to take on the great pains of body and soul that we deserve. Isaiah writes, *Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows... (Isaiah 53:4-5)*

Jesus took your pain. Yet a nasty cold lasts how long? A week? Two weeks? Even our more permanent ailments – diabetes, a sore back – are not truly permanent. They are part of this temporary world and will depart with this world. However, the pain that Jesus bore was eternal. *He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)*

Jesus has suffered with us, He has suffered for us. Our guilt has been taken off us and onto Him and into the grave forever. So He has made you His own, a member of His body, spiritually joined to all who share in this blessing of faith and life. If one suffers, all suffer. One little cut can become an infection that permeates the whole body and kills it. Our body does not ignore when its parts suffer.

It fights off those colds and infections. And it is not the more visible parts of the body, the arms or the legs that do this. It is those unseen members. Paul calls these the unpresentable and the seemingly weaker parts. Yet these are those which God has given the greater honor.

These are the Christians who, behind closed doors, are praying for you. These believers are ready to cook a meal, or send a get well card. These are the internal, unseen members who support and sustain the needs of the body. And the illnesses we face together are not merely physical – they are spiritual.

***25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.***

To have divisions or small clicks among us is to divide the body of Christ. We cannot survive if we are not of the same mind and same care for one another. Imagine if Christ had said "that's his problem" to us. When one member falls into trouble, all of us have fallen into trouble. When one falls into sin, all of us fall into sin. There should be no schism. And we are not governed by the pastor or the CLC. The head is Christ. He will heal us all. He will restore what is lost or damaged. He will guide the body to care and forgive, to heal and comfort the body.

***26 ... or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.***

When you jump for joy at good news, your arm doesn't say, 'I'm not interested in rejoicing.' You don't hang one shoulder limp while the rest of you rejoices. No, you leap together. You put your hands up and shout! Let us leap together. We rejoice together in the presence of Christ's body. Each and every Sunday gather here where Christ dwells, and together rejoice in the forgiveness of sins. We don't have to leap physically in order to rejoice spiritually. We sing the glory of heaven and the peace we share on earth. How could we leave here with any bitterness or divisions toward those who share this great gift? We are one.

But that doesn't mean there won't be differences among the function of the body. There are many differences in talents, in interests, in callings. Many of the gifts mentioned in v.28-31 have ceased altogether. God no longer needs to appoint apostles. They have fulfilled their purpose and they speak to us still in Scripture. No longer do we expect to speak in tongues, or to perform great healings. We have a much greater gift in the confirmed Word. The purpose of these miracles has met its goal by confirming the Word and will of God. God appointed each to serve His good purpose for the body.

***18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.***

It is that time of year where we elect officers to publicly serve and represent the church. It would be easy for us to slip into thinking of these elections in a political way. Winners and losers. Voted in, voted out. However, the idea that we are competing or making these choices is really foolish. "God has appointed." It is God's work to choose how the body will fit together in the work of Christ. Even if you volunteer – to clean the church, or to serve on the Church Council, we should still think of it in terms of God's gifts and God's calling.

"Earnestly desire the best gifts." Paul says. Gifts are something the Spirit develops. Pastors aren't born with a gown on. It took several years of college and three years of Seminary studies and will take many more years of experience for me to grow into this calling as your pastor. So also for every one of you, experience and study of Scripture are the only means by which any of us are equipped for work in the kingdom. *Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:5).*

Pray for the Spirit. Study the Word. The miracles of the Spirit come not by our determination or talent, they come by the hearing of faith – by hearing and believing God's Word. None of us are sufficient to carry on the gospel. None of us are qualified to tell others about Jesus. Not by ourselves. However in the body of Christ, all of us are equipped. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, (2 Corinthians 3:5).*

Yet the greatest of all gifts is has not even been mentioned. Next week we'll continue into chapter 13 where Paul says: "Yet I show you a superior way ... the greatest gift is love.. The greatest gift we should be pursuing is the love of Christ. Only this love can truly lead us out to knock down the walls that separate us to see each other, to see the needs, the suffering, the rejoicing of those to whom we have been joined. Let us walk in step with this body – our Savior Jesus Christ. We though many, are one – members of Christ. Amen.

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