

Scriptures 11/10/24

Psalms 133

1

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!

2

It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.

3

It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

I Corinthians 12:4-4

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, **5** and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, **6** and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. **7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. **8** To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, **9** to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, **10** to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. **11** All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

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, **23** and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, **24** whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, **25** that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. **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.

John 13:33-35

33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' **34** I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. **35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Friends, I shared this message with you last year on our new member Sunday. As GCC moves forward – approaching the start of the new Sunday School year, stewardship time and the annual meeting - I have been feeling like we need to revisit this idea, with some revisions.

When I was a teenager, I played soccer. I loved being outdoors in the fall weather. I remember on my 18th birthday, our co-ed Southern Vermont College soccer team played the team at the College of St. Rose. It had rained in the morning and by the afternoon had turned to that icy snow mix and the field was a slippery mess. It was glorious. What I loved about my position - defense - was the way I got to use my body; I felt powerful.

Nowadays, my body and I don't always feel powerful. There are times when if someone asks if I need anything, I say, "a new body....at the very least, a new back." After getting a new shoulder, knee and hip, I don't REALLY want a new back – that kind of surgery does not interest me at all. Yet there are times I just wish the painful parts of my body would be dismissed from my life so I could live in peace, without the distraction of some part of me hurting or not working right.

The reality, as we know, is that life with painful, compromised, or missing body parts presents challenges. We have to find ways to adapt. We discover both new strengths, as we pivot to adjust; and new limitations when adjustments can't be made. The reality is that God gave us these bodies and every part of the design is important.

Our scriptures bring our attention to our need for each other and the importance of being in unity. Beginning with the brief psalm, we are provided with the image of unity as a lush and hospitable state. The hospitality of Aaron being generously anointed with precious oil, which was a necessity in that climate, is one image. A host would provide oil to alleviate the dry and dusty skin of visitors. The second image, the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion, also speaks to the lush provisions of God.

Mount Hermon is located in far north of Israel, north of Dan and east of Tyre, nearly as far north as Damascus. It is one of the highest points in the region. Significantly, it is snow-capped, and the dew that descends on its heights is in marked contrast to the aridity of the surrounding areas. Additionally, Hermon is a major source of the Jordan River. When the ice caps thaw, water from Hermon flows down to water the whole land. So our psalmist provides us these images of unity that are a provision of care for each other.

Our gospel reading is short and succinct: Love one another as God has loved us - that's how people will know you are followers of Jesus. But geez, doesn't it sometimes feel hard to love EVERYONE??

When we talk about the body of Christ, as does our passage from first Corinthians today, we are talking about the entirety of Christians - even if their understanding of the gospel is different from ours. For our purposes today, we look at this text with an eye to welcoming our new members. As a body, our members make us whole.

We are a community made up of many members and many gifts. There is not one of us here who could (or should!) say to another, "we have no need of you." There was such a beautiful example of this at the church council meeting Thursday night – each person present clearly values the role the others play, and there is interchange between the committees, just as there is between parts of the body. Paul articulates the varieties of gifts, and contrasts- strangely - "weaker" and "inferior" members with "indispensable" and "greater" members to make the point that we are all needed here. I struggled a bit with his language about "inferior" members (one translation used the term "unseemly:)- what the heck does that mean?!!! Who here would call another of us an "inferior" member? Similarly, whom would we consider "more respectable" or with "greater honor?"

Here, Paul puts the question in the mouth of the one who feels *excluded* from the body. It is as if some of the Corinthian Christians said, "I don't have this certain spiritual gift. I guess I'm not part of the body of Jesus Christ." After all, *hands* and *eyes* seem more important and more "glamorous" than *feet* and *ears*. So Paul wants these Christians who felt excluded to know they are indeed members of the body, and their sense that they are not is just as foolish as the foot or the ear that feels excluded.

Yet the same principle can be stated towards those who want to *exclude others* from the body. Paul could have just as well said, "The hand cannot say the foot is not of the body because it is not a hand." Paul wants Christians who might exclude others because they don't appreciate their place in the body to recognize the fact of unity.

The parts of our bodies normally covered by clothes are often considered **less honorable**, but we give them **greater honor** by clothing them so carefully.

Regarding the **less honorable** parts: my research suggests Paul meant the organs, such as *heart*, *lungs*, *stomach*, and *intestines*. These, when compared with the *arms* and *limbs*,

are comparatively *weak*; and some of them, considered in *themselves*, less honorable; yet these are more essential to life than any of the others.

Even so, God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which seemingly lacks it: If someone feels they are a “hidden” or “unglamorous” member of the body of Jesus Christ, God knows how to bestow honor upon them.

Even so, this feels a little abstract, right? The way I see it is that we have some folks in greater spiritual or even material need than others. Sometimes we are faced with situations with members who need the most intensive kinds of care - beyond prayers, there is also the need for food or shelter or consolation or support. I believe this is a double sided opportunity. For the one in need, it is an opportunity to be vulnerable to the others in our community and present the invitation to build a trusting relationship. And for the ones meeting that need, it is an opportunity to “love others as God has loved” them. The “strong” become the servants; the power balance is switched in the household of God.

We have many gifts in this community. Each of you is an important part of the body; we all need each other. And just like the times I wish I had a different back, the reality is I must love and cooperate with the one I do have! Sometimes a part of me is a pain, but I still need it.

So I’d like us to illustrate this. We did this last year, but the body we assembled has gone missing!! About a dozen of you opened your bulletins today to find a piece of a body. I invite you now to come forward and assemble the body of Christ.