

Sermon- Being the Body of Christ

Scripture: 1 Cor 12: 7-31

Sunday, June 21, 2020

One of the things that is different about being in the outdoors is that it is a dynamic space right? Because the conditions are always changing. Set in just such a condition, an intriguing Bible passage in Luke 12:56 Jesus tells the pharisees that they know how to interpret the earth and the sky to forecast the weather but they fail to be interpreters of the time they are living in. As people of God, in other words we ought to know how to read the times we live in. Now we certainly live in strange times. We are in the midst of a global pandemic that is similar in scale to something that happened a hundred years ago. Then we have an economic situation that has not seen unemployment this high since the Great Depression. We have protests on the race issue like we have not seen since the time of Martin Luther King! With wave after wave of big things happening the question that many are wondering about is, “what does this moment mean for us as individuals and us as a church.

To get clarity about what to do as a church, it would really help I believe to examine what it means to be church. That is what this sermon series that I am starting today will address. In the New Testament, you find 5 metaphors describing the church and each sermon in this series will look at one of these metaphors.

Today, I am going to start with the New Testaments description of the church as the “Body of Christ”. Now there are 22 different places in the New Testament where the church is being described as the body of Christ, but there are two places that have laid out some detail. Eph chapter 4 and 1 Cor chapter 12. This is what we are going to examine for today.

Before we get into our passage let me state the most obvious implications of the church being the “body of Christ”. It means that the church does two things. It represents Christ

in the world and does Christ's work in the world. But you might ask, how can any organization be given such a lofty goal of doing Christ's work in the world.

That is where our passage for the day comes in. The first thing we see is that in verse 7 it says, if you are a member of a church, God gifts you with a special spiritual gift. Yes you heard me right. Verse 7 says, "**A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.**" Now you could have more than one gift but you have at least one gift. What is the purpose of the gift? The purpose of this gift is to give you a new capacity to help the church by helping the people in it. This is something very significant because right off the bat, Apostle Paul is talking about an individual's contribution to the church that he or she is part of. It is not about what you can get out of the church but what you can give to the body of believers there. And everyone is a contributing member and blessing someone else in the body. And this capacity to bless is not something that you are biologically born with. This capacity is something that you get after you are spiritually reborn and become part of a church. Then God gives you at least one spiritual gift right from heaven to bless the church you are in. And what kind of gifts are we talking about?

⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice^[b]; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge.^[c] ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages,^[d] while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. Every one of the gifts listed here is actually really out of this world. And who gives us these gifts? Let me quote verse 11 for you here **¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.**

So the church in other words is a group of born-again believers who have been given special spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit to bless the rest of the church.

Now I will just clarify this at the outset that everyone who comes to church may not be a born-again believer. And that is OK because that means we are a church that is inviting others to taste and see that the Lord is good. And those who are not spiritually reborn will look at those who are and say, we want what they have 😊 But then there are those who are newly born-again. When you are newly born-again you may not necessarily know immediately what your spiritual gifts are. If there is not that understanding, then in the church we should find out your spiritual gifts so that you know what they are and the church knows what your gifts are so that you can be called to put your gifts to use to build the church.

Ok now, assume we have within our church a good understanding of what each one's spiritual gifts are. How does everyone's gifts balance out in a given local body? That is where the analogy of the physical body helps a lot. Because apostle Paul talks about the individual members and their spiritual gifts fitting together like the human body fits together with all of its individual parts and organs. Think of it like this. Now your body is made up of hands and feet and eyes and ears, each equally important and each performs a different function. And each needs the other. A ear for example is really useful but a ear without the rest of the body to go with it is absolutely useless right? That is the point that Apostle Paul is making in verse 17. And thanks to Apostle Paul, even though I really would like each of you to be paying really close attention, you won't catch me saying, "I want you to be all ears now 😊" On the other hand, imagine someone who comes to church and when asked what your spiritual gifts are and they tell you, their gift is being the stomach 😊. How convenient right! Well remember, the body parts is only the analogy to explain how the spiritual gifts interrelate to make the church complete. The body parts listed are not the listing of the spiritual gifts 😊 There

are many spiritual gifts and in our passage there is a list of them. Let me read for you this list. Verse 28 lists it like this,

***“first are apostles,
second are prophets,
third are teachers,
then those who do miracles,
those who have the gift of healing,
those who can help others,
those who have the gift of leadership,
those who speak in unknown languages.”***

Verse 8 to 10 lists some more ⁸ ***To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice^[b]; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge.^[c]*** ⁹ ***The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing.*** ¹⁰ ***He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages,^[d] while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.***

So what this passage is saying is that for a church to be complete you need apostles, prophets, teachers, those who do miracles, those who heal, those who help others, those who can lead, those who speak in tongues and many more. Now I won't be dealing with each of these elements individually here. But if you take just this list, what an ideal church should look like would be a well lead group of people who hear from God and speak to each other about what they are hearing, you will have people who can teach the word of God, people who have the gift of healing, people who have the capacity to demonstrate the extraordinary power of God in difficult situations.

Think about such a church. If that kind of church in all its power existed, it could change the orbit of the earth if need be. Now let's bring it down a notch and apply this chapter to our church. What would apostle Paul say of us? What gifts do we have that all churches should have? Are we missing any essential spiritual gifts? Well if we are, we know exactly what we should be praying for. We should be praying for new people who have those gifts or we should be praying for God to give the essential gifts to those who are already part of our church. I love verse 31. It says, **"you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts"**. So if we need to figure out the next steps for our church, it would be summed up very simply like this, 1. identify which gifts we need the most, 2. then start praying for these gifts. It will take prayer to identify the gifts as well so I guess we will have to start with prayer anyway.

As we prayer these focused prayers to discern gifting and express our desires for the most useful gifts, we will grow as the body of Christ to be more completely clothed with strength and beauty and become even more effective agents of Christ's work in such a time as this. Does anybody want to be part of the church like that? Let's pray.