

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer

January 28, 2007

www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org

The Whole Body of Christ I Corinthians 12: 14-26

Paul's argument here is almost too crass to explicate, as Paul would acknowledge.

After all, Paul was a product of his Hebrew upbringing and knew very well that it was bad form to mention sexual organs in public discourse, knew that he would especially be considered vulgar to refer to these organs in religious discourse, since they were considered ritually unclean.

But Paul was desperate to convey spiritual truth to a foolish, fractious Corinthian Christian community, and thus employed the metaphor of the human body as his central image of the church, noting that God has the most ironic sense of inclusiveness.

The church is the whole body of Christ. It is God-composed of no dispensable parts.

Indeed, those so-called "lesser members of the body," those unmentionable, unclean members, are the very ones to which God has given the most vital function of perpetuating the human race.

My dear Corinthians, Paul continues, some of you consider yourselves greater members of Christ's body, more important, more vital and more necessary in function than other members.

I won't quarrel with your self-estimation, says Paul, as long as you remember that in the God-composed body of Christ, those whom you regard as lesser members may be those in whom God has invested the most crucial functions.

Treasure everyone. Treat no one as dispensable, for greater and lesser members together constitute the whole body of Christ. Without all of us, none of us is truly whole in faith.

Paul was writing to a church so divided that even its communion brought no communion.

Certainly they had forgotten their union with each other in the body of Christ.

We can give thanks that our congregation is not rent by the deep divisions that split their fellowship, but even so, there is an application of Paul's truth to our own fellowship.

We, too, seek to experience the whole body of Christ.

Yet there are those of us who might consider some members greater than others.

Indeed, within our congregation we have a host of people infirm of mind and body, who are aged, weak, unable to participate with us.

We might consider them lesser members of Christ's fellowship.

There might be those of us more active and healthy who consider ourselves greater members of the body.

Paul reminds us that the body of Christ is such that only through the interaction of the greater and lesser members can all experience truly the whole body of Christ.

Who knows what vital function God might have invested in those so-called lesser members?

To acknowledge this crucial theological point our congregation has developed a variety of ministries and programs to reach out to our "lesser members."

We have the Soup-to-Go, the "Love of One's Neighbor" Committee, Saturday Servants, and deacon flocks.

We have a variety of ministries meant to keep before our eyes those invisible members who for one reason or another cannot be with us -- and yet they yearn for our presence.

As one lady said at the end of a visit: "Please come again; it's a strange thing, but only in talking to another person do you remember who you are."

We know who we are only through interaction with each other.

An infant can receive all of the food, liquid and warmth necessary for life,

but that infant will die if deprived of human touch.

Only through interaction, greater and lesser members together, do we experience the whole body of Christ.

I would add in passing that many of you take this truth to heart.

Indeed, not long ago I was in the home of a couple, both beset by great medical needs,

and mostly homebound, who have not been a part of our congregation that long.

The man's voice broke in tears as he said, "I told a neighbor just yesterday,

'St. John's Baptist has made us feel so loved! They have made us feel part of their family.' "

Such affirmation should fill us with a holy pride, but that testimony should also call from us an increased resolve to reach out to our lesser members as we set about the task of constructing our new year.

There is no one in this congregation who would look upon an infant deprived of touch and not reach out.

But all too often we drive by doors, by nursing homes, by places where live people who hunger and thirst for our companionship and our time.

Our time! We hold ourselves back from interactions with homebound members because we think we wouldn't have anything to say, but when we put ourselves in such situations the conversations flow freely.

All that is required of us to interact with those weak and infirm members of the body of Christ is our time!

So, as we end this series of sermons that focuses upon the disciplines that are to form our routines

as enter this new year, let us commit to setting aside a little time

to interact with those invisible members of Christ's body who would love to be a part of us but cannot unless we reach out to them.

For if Paul is right, the greater and lesser members can only find their identity in communion with each other, and none of us can find our full identity unless we invest in each other's lives.

Our Lord says, "Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood."

Symbolically, through communion we experience the truth that Christ is in all of us, and we are all in Christ.

But we are all also in each others' lives, and your life is a constituent element of my life, and my life is a constituent element of your life.

This is what it means to experience the whole body of Christ.

Let us keep this truth in mind as we partake of the universal symbols of our Lord's love.

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer

January 28, 2007

Communion Sunday