

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
January 27, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Today, in our second reading from Paul's letter to the church of Corinth we have almost a perfect passage to be read on the day in worship we baptize and welcome the newest child of God, Aynsley, into the church, which Paul refers to as the body of Christ. Paul begins our passage today with a mini theological treatise on baptism – a tangible sign of God's grace – reminding the Corinthians that baptism is their entrance into a new beginning, a new life, and a new way of living as he writes:

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.

In just a few minutes as we, too, gather around those very same storied waters our Lord and Savior was baptized into we will hear echoes of Paul's words. Listen, when that time comes to some of the very first words proclaimed:

By water and the Word ... We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and joined in God's mission for the life of the world.

The promise is the same as it was all those centuries ago when Paul first preached this message to the diverse Corinthian church learning to live out their baptismal calling as the people of God baptized into Christ Jesus' death and resurrection. They came from all walks of life and as so often is the case with human institutions diversity soon gives way to differences. The beauty of our uniqueness and the biblical understanding we are all created in the likeness of God gives way to the stranglehold of sin that rears its ugly head in the form of greed, power,

control, and ego. The spirit of the ruling power of day takes shape in the newly formed community of believers rather than the spirit of God in Christ Jesus that this community is called to embody and live out revealing a new world order.

You see the body metaphor was widely used throughout the Roman Empire and other governing bodies of the day. The head was none other than the Emperor himself. The one in charge. The brains and brawn of which all other parts of the body were subject to. The other parts such as the hands and feet were subservient to the head. They were the laborers merely existing to do the work of the government and to keep the machine running along smoothly. This is the spirit or mindset that the people knew. It was the cultural norm which had been embedded into their way of life.

So as the church was formed and began to grow it seems only logical this way of life would at some point take shape amongst this new community of believers. There were differences due to the result of some being rich and some being poor. There were differences due to some being male and some being female. There were differences, as we heard last week, over some having certain spiritual gifts that seemed more important than those of others. Factions were beginning to form and the new life inaugurated by the birth of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, how he lived and brought to reality the inbreaking kingdom of God for all to see and which was to be at the core of the young church and be a beacon of light shining in the midst of fractured world was instead casting a totally different glow than was God's will and intent for the church.

So, Paul comes on scene and proclaims a message we, the body of Christ, need to hear yet today as he reminds the church:

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.

This is our starting place. In the world some of us will be democrats and republicans. In the world some of us will be rich and poor. In the world some of us will be Americans, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, Canadians, Asian or Latino just to name a few or as it were in Paul's day some were Jews or Greeks. In the world some of us will be Hawkeyes and some of us will be Cyclones. Some of us will be Cub fans and some of us will be Cardinal fans. In the world some of us will be in favor of a wall being built while others of us will be opposed to it.

But in our baptism and incorporation into the body of Christ all that changes. This community of faith will look entirely different than what the world attempts to conform it be. Christ is the body and we are members of it. Christ, not the emperor or president or governor or mayor or bishop but Christ alone is the body and together we are joined to and part of the His body. Equally. Complementing each other. Building up the other to be the visible body of Christ in the world. No one part of this body is more powerful than the other. No one is better than another. What matters in this body is love – Christ-like love that is servant love, self-giving love, reconciling love, forgiving love, equality love, unconditional love.

Now, while the church in Corinth struggled with this and as we see in Corinth reverted at times to its old ways of the world in this they lived, the young church certainly got it right often because many gravitated toward this new way of life as the young church grew exponentially. In fact, we hear in the book of Acts of thousands being baptized at a time. In a society in which so many were deemed to be of little to know value, little hope of change was to be found, many including women and children were viewed as little more than personal property, the young church and the good news of Jesus Christ proclaimed by it were an open window into a new reality. It was a vision of the kingdom come.

It was the one place in which all were to be equal just as God had created and intended. Differences were to be torn down and in its rubble new life would emerge in the beauty and unity of our individual uniqueness that works to glorify God and enrich the livelihood of the community of believers. And Paul pushes this new reality where Jesus himself had pushed it. In this new community the last will be first and the first will be last. The perceived weakest parts of this body deemed dispensable by society standards are indispensable in Christ's church – in God's

kingdom come. Those parts of the body deemed less honorable – perhaps the women and children, the elderly and widowed, the lost and forgotten, the sick and the lame, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the stranger and imprisoned, the weak and the haughty, the prostitute and tax collector, the man travelling the road from Jerusalem to Jericho robbed, beaten and left to dead lying alongside the road and the foreigner, the Samaritan, who came to his aid – these people held by many in ill regard are, in the body of Christ and the kingdom of God, held in great honor and regard. Because they are vital, equal, and necessary parts of the body because as Paul writes in verse 18 and reminds the church, “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”

As we baptize Aynsley and remember our own baptisms in this beautiful body of Christ that is the church listen not only to the words at the beginning of this sacrament of grace but also to the words at the end:

Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that those who are washed in the waters of baptism may be given new life.

The promise of baptism and our incorporation into the body of Christ is that we are given a new life. We are no longer judged by societal standards. We are no longer bound by differences. We are no longer held captive to sin. We no longer must fear death. Gone are our differences and instead differences are viewed as traits to behold because God created us uniquely, wonderfully, beautifully, lovingly with gifts, qualities, characteristics and traits that work equally and simultaneously to reveal to this fractured world a kingdom unlike any other and a love open to all.