

Pastor Troy Schreiner—Victory Lutheran Church, Jacksonville FL

January 26, 2020—Third Sunday after Epiphany

Series/Theme: Lightbulb Moments—Am I an Eye? Or a Foot?

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27—Many Parts, One Body

I'm confident this will be the first time anyone has ever asked you this. Do you ever feel like you're a vestigial organ? I told you! No one's ever asked you that before, have they? If that look on your face means you don't know what a vestigial organ is, basically, a vestigial organ is a body part thought to have no real purpose. Like your appendix, tailbone, or wisdom teeth. Do you ever feel like you're a vestigial organ?

Obviously, you're not an actual body part. But in a sense, you are. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, ***"You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*** Just like our bodies are composed of many different parts with different functions, the body of Christ is composed of every Christian-- many different parts with many different abilities and functions. So, what body part are you? An eye? A foot? A hand? The heart? Or do you view yourself as the appendix—a part seemingly without any purpose or function in the body of Christ? Or as the gallbladder, which has a purpose, but the body can live without. Because you realize you could serve a purpose in the body of Christ, but you don't, because you figure even without you, the body will be just fine.

Today on "Body of Christ Sunday," God's Word reminds us what it means to be part of the body of Christ and of the body of believers here at Victory. Generally, church members fall into one of three groups.

Some are fully committed to using their gifts to serve God for the church whenever and however they can; the people who are here about as often as I am.

Some would like to serve, but they're not sure what gifts they have, or how their gifts would translate to serving God and carrying out the church's purpose. They want to serve, but they're unsure how to, so they usually don't.

Finally, some don't serve at all, nor do they want to. They come for an hour of worship Sunday morning, but that's it. They treat church like consumers, rather than like parts of the body.

Whichever group you fall into, God has words to remind and encourage you, and help us understand what it means to be ***Many Parts, One Body***.

If the body of Christ is composed of all Christians--a bunch of diverse parts with different backgrounds and experiences; different races, genders, and social strata; different interests, likes, and dislikes, is it like Frankenstein's monster? With all that diversity, how can Paul say we're one unified body? Because despite the diversity of the parts, God has made us one. ***"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free."***

Whether the Spirit brought you to faith through the Word and water of your baptism, or through hearing the Gospel, God made us one through faith that Jesus, the head of the body, is our Savior! Through faith, we have unity despite the diversity!

But God also blesses his church through diversity! As Paul wrote, ***"The body is not made up of one part, but of many."*** We can easily identify the really important parts of the body. Good luck living without a brain or heart! But where would we end the list of "really important body parts?" Think how many diverse body parts had to function for you to drive to church this morning. Your heart had to pump blood through your circulatory system; your brain had to immediately process the vast amounts of information your eyes and ears were perceiving, so your arms, hands, and fingers could use the steering wheel, and your legs, feet, and toes could push the pedals. And you probably did most of it without thinking. For the body to function at its fullest capacity, a huge number of diverse body parts with diverse functions need to work together. Many parts, one body.

The same is true of the body of Christ! My name might be on the business cards, but where would we possibly end the list of “really important parts of the body of Christ?” Think how many diverse abilities need to function for a Sunday morning to go smoothly. Musicians play, people sing, ushers usher, hosts welcome; counters count the offering; the property is maintained inside and out; the coffee gets made, the worship folders get printed, the children are taught, and the list continues! Even if the pastor is constantly firing on all cylinders and always has the greatest ideas (That’s a hypothetical pastor, not me!), without the rest of the body of Christ contributing their diversity of talents, we can’t function at our fullest capacity to carry out our ministry and purpose! Within the church’s unity is beautiful diversity.

But sometimes, diversity produces division. We see the talents of another and feel jealous. Or we observe the gifts of another part of the body of Christ and start playing the dangerous comparison game; self-deprecatingly thinking, “My gifts aren’t as good as theirs. I’m worthless.” Like Paul illustrates, we become a bunch of feet saying, ***“Because I’m not a hand, I don’t belong to the body.”***

I struggle with that sometimes. I hear another pastor’s sermon and wish I could preach that well; teach that well; connect with people that well. Maybe you do similar things at church, or at work. But when we compare our gifts to others’, instead of rejoicing and praising God for the gifts he’s given to us and others, we discontentedly convince ourselves we’re “vestigial organs” in the body of Christ. And if we don’t think we have a purpose, we stop serving.

But as Paul says, ***“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?”*** Imagine the monstrosity if we were all big eyeballs rolling around. Imagine the difficulty of the church functioning effectively if we could all fix electrical problems, but none of us could teach.

The other division that can arise from diversity is conceitedness; when we look at other parts of the body of Christ, and think, “I’m so much more important than them!” Like Paul says, ***“The eye can’t say to the hand, I don’t need you,” and the head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.”*** To work most effectively, the parts need each other. The eye is extremely important, but if it doesn’t have a hand, it can’t pick up what it sees. The head is extremely important, but without feet, it can’t get where it’s thinking about going. That’s a good reminder from God for his super committed servants. It’s easy to look down on those who don’t serve as often. But the truth we all need to know is that we all need each other!

That wasn’t what one church thought. I saw the headline this week—***“Struggling Minnesota Church Asks Older Members to Go Away.”*** A declining Methodist church in Cottage Grove, MN, trying to revitalize their ministry, called in a church-planting specialist. The specialist recommended that they make the members, most over the age of 60, go worship somewhere else, thinking that without these gray-hairs, the church could better appeal to the younger crowd. They called it a restart; a revamp. But this was an amputation! Cutting off body parts no longer deemed beneficial or necessary. Don’t worry, 60+ crowd. You’re safe here!

That church missed the point. Instead of getting rid of body parts, all the parts need to work together to carry out the church’s purpose at peak productivity. To take advantage of all the gospel opportunities God’s dropping into our laps here in Jacksonville, we need to shoot for 100% of the church doing 100% of the work, rather than 20% doing 80% of the work. Think what we could accomplish by God’s grace if all the parts worked together!

As members of the body of Christ, two things are true for each of us. We can’t say that we’re not needed, and we can’t say that we don’t need others. Because ***“God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.”***

That changes everything, doesn’t it? The God who “knit us together in our mother’s womb,” who formed Adam from the dust, is the one who composes the body of Christ, gifting people with specific abilities which he, in his perfect wisdom, knows are needed for the church to carry out its purpose. Literally no one can say, “I have no gifts.” Or “My gifts are worthless.” Or “I should have those gifts instead.” Whatever gifts you have, God gave them to you for a specific purpose, for the good of his church!

That also means that if any part of the body refuses to use their God-given talents to serve, the church can't function to its fullest potential. God doesn't intend us to view ourselves as worthless, purposeless, amputated limbs. He wants us to view the church as a body we're a pivotal part of! Many parts, one body. Unity in the diversity, all working together to accomplish the same purpose—***"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*** That's why we serve. Not so people will praise us. But so people will look at us and our service to Jesus, and think, "Their God must be amazing if they're willing to serve and sacrifice for him like that!"

And he is that amazing! Just marvel at the fact that YOU are a part of the body of Christ! God could have chosen to carry out his ministry in so many different ways. He could tap his angels, or use miraculous signs, visions, and voices from heaven. But instead, he uses us as his hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouths here on earth. In mercy, God took a bunch of dead, worthless, useless, amputated limbs and organs, and gave them eternal life and eternal purpose as part of his own body! You are the body of Christ! Many parts, one body.

Back to my original question about vestigial organs. As scientific technology has advanced, large numbers of vestigial organs, once deemed to have no purpose or use in the body, have been found to have purpose in the body, even if small. Nothing in the body that God has knit together is without purpose or function.

How much more so in the body of Christ! There are no vestigial organs in Christ's body. Whether you're on church council, the church president, or a shut-in who can do nothing but sit in her chair and pray for her church, you're living as part of the body of Christ; making use of the special gifts and privileges that God has given to you! Many parts, one body.

Today, we want to give you some hands-on encouragement; a way to "exercise" the body of Christ! If you want to serve at Victory, but aren't sure how, at the tables and media booth around the sanctuary, we're presenting different ways you can serve in Victory's gospel ministry. At each table, you'll find representatives from the different ministry areas, who can answer any questions you might have. You'll also find full job descriptions that answer main questions like time commitment, training, and what constitutes a "victory!" Grab those job description sheets and take them home with you. There's also a section on p. 9 of the worship folder where you can take notes on opportunities that interest you.

Take about 15 minutes to scope out the tables, then I'll call you back, we'll put an "Amen" on this sermon, and continue the service! You are the body of Christ—many parts, one body. Let's go see how we can serve the one who is our head, and our Savior!

There's no such thing as a vestigial organ in the body of Christ. All of you have gifts and purpose that God will use. May he give us the zeal and the joy to use them faithfully, that all might know our Savior's name! Amen.