



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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January 21, 2007

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26, 27

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 61:1-6

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 19

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26, 27

Gospel: Luke 4:14-21

You Are the Body of Christ!

Three times in my life the Lord has blessed me and enabled me to go with a group of people from Michigan to golf in Laughlin, Nevada in the end of February. It has been really enjoyable. It is something I enjoy and wish I could do every year, but I just can't do it. There is that thing called "Lent" that comes at the end of February most years. But every time I went, the way I funded it was by selling things on EBay—not my kids because they are still all sitting over there, but things that I don't necessarily need anymore.

At this time of the year, I have really done well selling things on EBay to put money aside for things like that. During this time of the year, one of the things that sells really well for me are books that have to do with things that I don't know much about—things like weight loss. At this time of the year, it makes sense, right? People have made their New Year's Resolutions and that is usually one of the top ones, right?—"This year I am going to get in shape"—so exercise books and diet books and things like that have usually sold really well for me.

This morning our God comes to us and talks to us about an even more important body that needs to function well and needs to be fit and needs to work together so that it can do the work that God has given it. Our God looks each one of us in the eye this morning and says to everyone that belongs to him through faith, "You are the body of Christ"—so that body especially needs to be fit and active.

He reminds us of two truths to remember. Within the body that we have there are a lot of different parts, but they all work together for one body. In the same way he tells us that within the body of Christ there are a lot of different gifts that God gives. We are all different is what he tells us, but he also reminds us that each one of us within the body of Christ is important for that body to be what God wants it to be.

Last week we looked at a lot of this same picture, the same thing about spiritual gifts, and we talked about how different means different. It doesn't mean better or worse. That is kind of what he is driving home again this morning as we look at these words. Remember the Corinthian congregation? They had all kinds of problems with all kinds of things. They said in their Christian freedom that they had a member committing incest, and they thought it was wonderful that he was using his Christian freedom this way. They were mixed up on that. Instead of the Lord's Supper, they would come together and some of them would get drunk. They were abusing the gift of Christ's body and blood, so Paul writes and he talks at length about those things. Also one of

the things he writes and talks at length about was in Corinth they had a problem with division, clicks, people saying, “I am better than you because I follow this guy and you follow that guy, and I am better than you are because I have this spiritual gift—I can speak in tongues and you can’t. All you can do is serve with your hands. You are about next to useless.” That is what he talks about in all of Chapter 14.

Because there was this jealousy and envy over spiritual gifts and some elevated as better and others not as good, he spends about three chapters talking about the use of spiritual gifts. He starts out in Chapter 12. In Chapter 13, that great chapter you are familiar with—the chapter on love—that deals with spiritual gifts. Then in Chapter 14 he goes on to say not to overvalue some of these gifts—like speaking in tongues. This incredible truth that he lays in front of us should be obvious to us, but he has to hammer it home in those three chapters. Each of you has different gifts, and that is something you should really value and you should really treasure.

We saw last week that every Christian has spiritual gifts. If you say there is nothing you can do, you are calling God a liar. None of us here wants to do that. But sometimes we might say that our gift isn’t as important as the gift that another person has, so we don’t use it. He makes the point that you have to have all kinds of different gifts. He uses the illustration of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would you be? If just on the top of your neck you had one huge eyeball, that might be cute for a movie like “Monsters,” but where would you be if God had made you with just a huge eyeball? Think of how tired you would be from blinking all the time with something come at it. It just wouldn’t work that way. God arranges us the way he wants our bodies to be. You can’t have one part that you think is really all that much more important because they all have to work together. If you don’t have your hands, it doesn’t matter about some other things because you aren’t going to work as well. The hands serve a different function than the ears do. They eyes serve a different function than the kidneys do, but if any one of those has problems, then you have problems, right?

God knew what he was doing when he put our bodies together. Think about it. Can you imagine if God would have put your eyeball on your elbow? Instead of your funny bone hitting, can you imagine that? Think about how many black eyes you would have all the time. Or if he would have put your nose where your big toe is—how would that be to go through life? God put the parts of the body right where he wants them; the same way he put the parts of the body of the body of Christ right where he wants them. The gifts that he gave you to use are the gifts he said, “For my body, my church, to function effectively, for the gospel to be proclaimed, for people to be built up, for unbelievers to come to faith, for that to work the best it can be, here is the gift that you have and you need to use it or else it isn’t going to work as effectively.”

It doesn’t matter if you wanted the gift of teaching but your gift is serving with your hands. It doesn’t matter if you wanted the gift of contributing generously out of love and your gift is showing mercy. Whatever your gift is, it is important. It is needed. It might be different, but it is very, very important.

Think about it in your life. Think of how important it is that your spouse isn’t exactly like you. Who would really want to marry themselves? When you have a marriage that is

successful, isn't it because the two differences, the two people together, their differences make them better than they are individually? It's the same way in the body of Christ. As we use all of our gifts together out of love for what Christ has done for us, we become more than the sum of our individual parts. God also tells us that every single one of us is important.

Every year we look at this section of Scripture in Confirmation Class and every year, to talk about every part of the body is important, I ask the kids, "What is an unimportant part of your body?" Eventually I lead them to get around to their little finger. Do any of you guys remember? What do I have someone do? I have someone put their little finger on the edge of a table, go grab one of the big, unabridged dictionaries and walk over and slam the dictionary down right next to their finger. How many kids do you think leave their finger there each year? I don't think I've ever had anyone leave it there. They all yank it away, even though I would never hit it. But why would you yank your little finger away from that big book? It's because if your little finger, which you don't think is all that big of a deal, gets broken, your whole body suffers, right? If I sent the kids upstairs to Mr. Muchka's room after I broke one of their fingers and they had to write a test, do you think it is going to be that great of a test? The body doesn't work together unless all the parts are functioning together well.

Think about what God says that means for you. God has given you spiritual gifts. There is no "if" he has. He has. If you say, "I don't have time. I don't have the ability. I'm not needed"—what happens to the body of Christ? It limps. It drags. Then what happens? The gospel of Jesus Christ is not proclaimed to those who already believe. The gospel that Jesus lived and died in our place is not proclaimed to those who do not yet believe. Think of how important that is that we grow in our faith and that we go with our faith, because as we gather together to know him better, we glorify God as then we go and do those things. Think of how important it is that each of us uses his gifts.

It's not a pleasing thought, is it? Have I always used my spiritual gifts to the best of the ability God has given me? Have I always done it out of love for Christ because I get to, or have I done it at times because I have to or else no one else will do it? You have to admit, we have failed God when it comes to this. There isn't a person in this room that hasn't failed God when it comes to this at one time or another in our lives. We are sinners. We come up with excuses. We get tired. We get lazy. We get distracted. That is just the truth.

Now think about this truth—even though we have come up with all kinds of excuses why we shouldn't use our spiritual gifts, our God still looks us in the eyes and says, "I have taken away every one of those times that you have failed me. Jesus nailed it to the cross. It was punished. You are not going to be punished for your failings. Jesus served perfectly in your place, so now when I look at you; I see his perfect service and the perfect use of his gifts." Then we can rejoice that he has taken away those sins and those failings. Then, out of love for what he has done for you, look again at your gifts, because you are the body of Christ and you need to put those into practice—not to be saved. That has already been done for you. Not because God needs you—he doesn't. But you need to say, "Thank you Lord that you have taken away my sins."

You get to say, "Thank you Lord" as you use your gifts within the congregation, within the synod, and within wherever you are in your life. You get to use your gifts, and then the body of Christ begins to function in a fit way and in an active way, and the power of God is unleashed among us and God then will do more than we can ask for or imagine, and he will do it through sinners like you and me.