



TRI-PARISH MAIL MINISTRY

Grace
Valentine

Peace
Mission

St. Paul's
White River

Epiphany 3
January 23, 2022

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 97

Hymns: 131; 477; 676

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 61:1-6
Luke 4:14-21

In Jesus' Name!

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27 ESV

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. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

In Christ Jesus, whose body we are by grace through a Spirit-given faith, dear fellow redeemed:

“An Army of one!” “Be all that you can be!” “You deserve a break today!” “Do your own thing!” We live in a culture that emphasizes the individual. That is not all bad. We want individuals to assume personal responsibility. We want them to use their God-given talents and to excel in those areas in which they have been blessed and to which the Lord calls them. However, the emphasis placed on individualism can and does have a down-side—a side that if pursued leads to sin, to many negative consequences, and if left unchecked, to the judgment of God. When individuals begin to think only of themselves; when their energy and efforts are expended simply to satisfy their own desires; when no thought is given to God and little thought to their fellowmen, individuals are sinning against the expressed will of God. God informs us very clearly in Scripture that His holy will for us is that we love God above all things and love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt. 22:37,39).

God has high expectations for us and makes absolute demands of us. His law condemns our failures and demonstrates our woeful lack of perfection. His gospel, however, reveals His love for us in spite of our failures. God sent Jesus, His own dear Son, to be our champion—to take on our enemy Satan and to defeat him in battle on our behalf. Jesus was righteous for us and bestows His righteousness upon us. He bore our sins on the cross and so removes from us the judgment God would otherwise have placed on us. God now embraces us as His dear children for Jesus' sake and encourages us to place our faith, hope, and trust in Jesus as our Savior from sin, death, and hell.

It is within this precious context that the apostle Paul now comes to us with a delightful illustration of how we as individuals are all united in one body in Christ Jesus. He reminds us that we are to love and serve one another, so that we all are encouraged, built up, and ultimately can fulfill both our individual and our collective callings as God's dear children in this sin-filled world. Paul writes: *“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.”* My dear friends, let us consider that thought—**WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF ONE BODY IN CHRIST!** We shall see from our text that **God has united**

us in Christ through His Spirit and baptism, and that we are to function individually but not independently for the welfare of all!

I.

We are all familiar with sayings like “blood is thicker than water.” We recognize in this world certain relationships that exist—relationships within families, among friends, within organizations of all types. Most people would acknowledge that there is a relationship between individuals who are members of the same Christian congregation, but few people understand the true nature of that relationship. Fellow believers in and confessors of Jesus Christ share a special relationship with each other and with our dear Savior. It is this relationship that Paul seeks to describe by comparing us to different parts of the same body. A body has two eyes, two ears, a nose, ten fingers, and ten toes. All are individual members, but they share one body. Even so, while we are entirely different and individual people; while we live at different addresses and have different telephone numbers; while we have different birthdays and have a variety of individual preferences—we are still one body in Christ!

How is that the case? What makes it so? Paul explains: *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”* Blood relationships—family relationships, society suggests, are closer than water relationships—mere friendships. That may or may not be the case in reality. But the closest relationship of all from God’s point of view is that relationship we have as fellow believers in Christ. Family relationships are simply biological, while friendships are often a matter of common interests in things of this world. The spiritual relationship that we have together as fellow believers in Christ goes much deeper and lasts much longer than any family or friendship type of relationship we may have. That is the case, because God the Holy Spirit is the force behind our spiritual relationship with God and each other. The Holy Spirit through the means of grace—the gospel word and baptism—has claimed us as Christ’s own. We have been delivered from eternal death—snatched from the jaws of Satan himself and brought into Christ’s kingdom. As fellow believers we share eternal and unchanging truths, which form the basis of our core beliefs and help determine our words and actions. As believers the Holy Spirit has come to live within our hearts, giving us a common purpose, hope, and confidence.

Yes, we are different in many ways. We may have different ethnic backgrounds, as did the Jews and Greeks of Paul’s day. We may have different economic and social standings, as did the slaves and masters of Paul’s day. In the end, however, we are one in accordance with the will of our heavenly Father. Paul writes: *“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”* We are different. I like to sing; perhaps you do not. I am not mechanically inclined; perhaps God has given you the gift to fix virtually anything. That is just fine, for God has created each of us differently, for the express purpose that we might help each other as members of Christ’s single body.

Paul’s point is that in the midst of diversity, there is a Spirit-generated unity in which we can all rejoice, and through which we can provide each other support. Paul writes: *“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”* My dear friends, I fear that we so often forget this truth. We become so busy and so preoccupied with our own issues, that we easily forget about others who are experiencing great troubles. The result is that we fail to love and so sin, while our brethren remain weak because they lack our support. Let us repent of our all too often shallow and self-centered attitudes, remembering that we are linked for the very purpose that we might encourage those who are suffering and rejoice with those who are blessed. **WE ARE ALL ONE BODY IN CHRIST! God has indeed united us in Christ through His Spirit and baptism.**

II.

Let us then remember that **we are to function individually but not independently for the benefit of all!** Paul concludes our text by emphasizing that truth: *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”* Yes, we are individuals leading our own lives as God has called us.

We do not function as a herd—always together and going in the same direction. Yet, we are a unit—one body. We are not independent—cut off from everyone else, responsible to no one, and unconcerned about anyone. That which we do and that which we say should be for the benefit of all and lead to the edification of all.

Satan, as any predator, knows that a group that is united in their faith and shares a common purpose will be harder to attack and destroy than a lone individual. Consequently, he hates the unity that we possess and will do everything within his power to destroy that unity. Paul speaks of two ways that Satan tries to accomplish this. First, he speaks of those individuals who separated themselves from the body, for what might be a variety of reasons. He writes: *“For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.”* Satan often tries to sow dissatisfaction, jealousy, and envy within our hearts. He tries to get us to compare ourselves with others and to resent the gifts that God has given them, rather than to discover and develop those gifts God has given us. Satan will work on our feelings of inferiority, strive to make us feel worthless, and will attempt to get us to question whether we have anything at all to contribute. If he can succeed in blinding our eyes to our God-given gifts and the important role that each of us can play within the body of Christ, he might just be able to separate us from our fellow believers and lead us down a path to destruction.

What should our response be when we do not feel like we are part of the body of Christ? Remember Paul’s words: *“If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”* My dear friends, we cannot all do the same things, nor should we want to. Rather, let us recognize God’s mercy and grace in bestowing a whole range of gifts, abilities, interests, and desires—all wonderfully unique, but all to be used for the benefit of all!

Paul goes on, however, to point out that sometimes the problem is not with the individual, but with other members of the group. He writes: *“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”* There are times when Satan can stoke the fires of pride within our hearts. We can feel...oh so superior to others, especially if our gifts are more obvious to those around us than the gifts of others. How Satan wishes to drive walls of separation within the body of Christ through superior attitudes and critical remarks. We must be so very careful that we do not become Satan’s tools in driving away precious souls, whose gifts may be less obvious, but which are nonetheless God-given, God-intended, God-directed, and God-approved. Who are we to question the worth of others, whom God Himself has united with us? Rather, let us rejoice in our diversity and seek to instill within each other a firm love of our Savior and a commitment to use our every gift in His service, which in turn will bring blessing to all. **WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF ONE BODY IN CHRIST! We are to function individually but not independently for the benefit of all!** May it ever be so among us! Amen.

Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be glory!

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