

The Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12

Oct 3, 2021

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

1 Corinthians 12

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

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 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. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to 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 were to 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 the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 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 members, 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.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

--

When you need a new pair of sneakers, would you rather choose Adidas or Puma? Do you prefer the stylish and trendy Adidas that have been voted the best running shoe, or do you prefer the simple and sleek design of Puma?

While this seems to be a simple question of no more consequence than a personal preference, there was a time when this question totally divided an entire community to the point that the fans of one were not allowed to date or marry fans of the other, and stores would not allow customers in who wore the ‘wrong’ sneakers.

In the 1920’s, 30’s, and early 40’s, the Dassler Brothers Shoe Factory in Weimar, Germany was owned and run by brothers Addie and Rudolf Dassler. They were the only German makers of sports shoes so the factory in time became a primary supplier for the Hitler Youth and the German Olympic teams. Although with a difference in their enthusiasm for it, each brother joined the Nazi party. In time the political differences between them grew to a split that burst wide open when during an air raid, Addie and his wife jumped into a bunker with Rudolph and his family, and Addie said something along the lines of “those dirty fools are here again.” In all the drama from their falling out it is still unknown if Addie was referring to the ally war planes overhead or his brother’s family as the dirty fools. The brothers soon dissolved their shoe company, and each opened their own shoe factory. Addie named his brand ‘Adidas,’ and Rudolph named his brand, ‘Puma.’

The feud grew beyond the families as it quickly touched the psychology of the citizens of the town. The residents would go about their day looking down at each other’s feet, focused on who was wearing Addie’s shoes, or Rudolph’s shoes, focusing on who was wearing the wrong ones, the bad ones, and who was wearing the good ones, the right ones. As the story of this spread, Weimar became known as the ‘town of bent necks.’

While it seems like a gross overreaction and an absurdity for such a response, for such social violence and exclusion of one another over a simple product such as sneakers, such wide division over a sibling rivalry, the shoes actually are a profound symbol of the power of group membership, group identity. Even with so much in common—being in the midst of a world war, their shared nationality, their same hometown, collective common memories and experiences—none of that mattered as the powerful force of tribalism-- the behaviors and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group---dominated. *

Research psychologists Jay Van Bavel and Dominic Packer wrote about this seemingly almost impossible historical event to demonstrate just how easily we can form bonds with one another, but just as easily how we can break those bonds as to who is in and who is out.

At our most basic human nature and need we create bonds of loyalty and cooperation since we human beings are actually quite weak and flimsy in the world. We do not have claws, wings or sharp teeth to protect us so we must rely on survival by cooperation. How we work together, cooperate, sustain and share our different gifts, skills and talents with one another is essential for our survival as well as the quality of our lives. Yet we also have the dangerous ability to turn this inside out, to find differences between us so that we exclude as readily as we include. We can walk around as a world of bent necks as we seek to tell who is wrong and bad or right and good.

We have found a way to have an eye say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, and the head tell the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ We forget that God has called us to see one another as God sees us, that we are to have the same care for one another. We forget that if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. We

forget that we survive by cooperating, that we are much more alike than different, especially in the ways that truly matter.

A group identity is a powerful force that can be a sword or an olive branch. When we look at the news, social media, current events, we see both the good and the bad of this as the group we belong to—belong to based on life factors, interests, beliefs and values—impacts the lens by which we see the world. Are we seeing destitute, desperate refugees living in unbearable conditions along the border, or do we see people who are not obeying immigration laws? Do we see our planet suffering from abuse and pollution, or do we say that global warming is not happening? Do we see people living in poverty and homelessness and offer them a hand up, or do we leave them to take care of themselves no matter the situation?

On this World Communion Sunday, we are wonderfully reminded again of our Christian group identity as the Body of Christ across all of God's beloved humanity which not only unites us, it calls us to be a sustained, cooperative, powerful force in the world as the mission of God, the church of Jesus Christ. Each of us has been given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, as we use our additional spiritual gifts wherever we are, north or south, east or west.

Whether we have:

the gift of Wisdom, the intimate understanding of God's Word with the goal of guiding others toward a life of worship, righteousness and justice,

the gift of Knowledge, an understanding that the Scriptures and the Gospels are the foundation of our lives and our world,

the gift of Faith, the ability to manifest trust and confidence in God in many ways,

the gift of Healing, an intimate gift that reveals the compassionate heart of God,

the gift of Miracles, a keen sensitivity to the presence and power of God,

the gift of Prophecy to reveal God's intent and purpose with a sense of immediacy,

the gift of Discernment, the ability to recognize the influence of God or the world in any given situation, or

the gift of Tongues, the gift of languages, that glorify God,

each of these gifts bind us together as the Body of Christ in which all members are honored. God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

Today is a day to remember that we gather at the Communion table not only just as our own congregation, not only as Christians in NH, or the US, but with Christians all around the world in this joyful feast of God's people. We will do so in many varied ways. Some will have plenty to eat, others will share small bites and sips. For some the bread of heaven may be a freshly baked loaf, naan, pita, tortillas, or rice. For some the cup of blessing will be a cup of dirty water, others grape juice or wine, still others a local, native drink. Some will gather freely, openly, others in secret. Some will be loud, active, dancing; others will be quieter. Some will be masked and some will not. The words of invitation, institution and thanksgiving will be raised in

a glorious multitude of languages that praise God, gather us in gratitude, and welcome us to the table in remembrance that Christ's body and blood were given for all us, for each of us. We know and celebrate together that through Christ all things are made new as we will come to the communion table to be recreated through the bread and cup, and to be renewed in our faith and commitment.

It is also a day that is not to end as we leave the table, as we are to take away with us the bonds of the Spirit that baptized us together as many members, as one body, as the Body of Christ, each with different gifts all for the common good. And we will see a still more excellent way. Amen.

*Adapted from *The Power of Us* by Jay J. Van Bavel, PhD, and Dominic J. Packer, PhD , copyright © 2021. Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown Spark, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.