

1 Corinthians 12:12-27  
The Church: The Body of Christ  
Sunday July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Last week I spoke about belonging to the Family of God and this week I am speaking about belonging to the Body of Christ being a member of the Body of Christ. The body of Christ also is known as the Church.

But what you see in the Bible are two very different ways of describing “belonging,” and two different ways of experiencing and feeling belonging. One describes it in relational terms that of a family, and one in terms of the gifts of its members, that of a body. The concept of “Membership” in the English language in fact comes from these verses.

Mary Louise Roberson sent me the following devotional from Daily Guideposts. Jeff Japinga wrote:

*My son Mark was a four-day Jeopardy champion. I'm simply amazed at the ability of people like him "to answer in the form of a question" and to be so incredibly quick about it. It's not a gift I have.*

*Nor, apparently, is it one shared by a man named Johnny Gilbert, even though he has appeared on every episode of Jeopardy since its inception in 1984. I'm sure you know his voice, though, and the three words he is most famous for saying: "This is—Jeopardy!"*

*Gilbert said, before one of the tapings began, "No, no, I couldn't answer most of these questions." "But what I can do is make the contestants who can answer these questions feel welcome and comfortable, and make everyone watching at home feel included. And that's pretty important, don't you think?"*

*I was impressed with the way Gilbert made all of us feel welcome. In doing so, he embodied a simple but awfully important life-lesson: that*

*every one of us has a gift and a calling to use that gift well, in service to others, even if that work never makes our name famous beyond our own household.*

*I learned a lot from watching my son on Jeopardy but nothing more important than this, phrased, of course, in the form of a question:*

*How can I use the gift You have given me, God, to serve others?*

As a member of the Body, each of you has been gifted by God to serve others. Each of you has gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit that are vitally important to others. Some will tell you differently, but don't ever listen to them. Listen to God instead.

In fact verse 21 reads, "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.'" Within the Body of Christ you may have just a small part and yet be critical for the life of the whole body.

In the Church all belong; all are important and if any members are missing the whole body suffers. Verse 26 reminds us, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

**All are important all belong. But no one is all important!** Paul wrote this passage to a church in deep distress. There were some members who were thinking they and their gifts were inconsequential and others were telling them, because they did not have the gift of speaking in tongues, that yes indeed, they were inconsequential.

Some were excluding themselves and others were helping them along. Some were saying they were all important and others were thinking they and their gifts weren't important at all.

Both types of thinking are detrimental to us individually and to the Body of Christ.

God has built into us a need to belong to be a member of some human pack. If we don't have a family we seek to become a member of one. We make a family or adopt one. If we feel alone and lonely, which is a condition we as humans all share, we seek those with whom we can belong. We are social animals. We are herd animals. If we were dogs we would be beagles not lone wolves.



The God-given desire to belong is illustrated from a story from Mike Breen's book, "Building a Discipling Culture." Mike tells the story of Danny Wallace who lived in England. Being inspired by an uncle who in his lifetime had tried to create a community to belong to, Danny put a simple ad in a London newspaper that read: "Join me. Send a passport-sized photo to... and he gave his address." One person did so he set up a website.

In a short time he had over 101 joinees!! "They had signed up for a group for no other reason than to belong." In short order his joinees expected him to give meaning to this community, but it had no meaning or purpose....until Danny came up with one.



So he sent out a message to all his joinees that they would now be known as the Karma Army, and their purpose was to undertake one random act of kindness every Friday, now to be known as, "Good Fridays."

The Karma Army has grown world-wide now. And Mike Breen notes: "People are starving for community; so hungry, in fact, that they will join others simply because they are asked to. Where is the church with this hunger going on around us?" P. 79

In January I was watching TV and heard the CEO of Starbucks say something that fascinated me. He said, to the effect, that what they were trying to do in each and every Starbucks was to create a club where people could join, be a member. He had also keyed in on this deep and universal need to belong and has made billions on it.



*Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term “Third Place” to distinguish a location where people gather outside the familiar confines of the first and second places, home and workplace. Businesses that have embraced the value of becoming a known Third Place have expanded their appeal far beyond lattes and free Wi-Fi; they have become modern age community- and social-hubs and as a result have prospered.*

What fascinates me about the Karma Army story is that the guy, who started it, just made it up, and made up its purpose, one random act of kindness every Friday. He even stole the names he used: Karma & Good Fridays.

The Church on the other hand was made by God and given to us as a gift. It’s a place to belong that has as its membership requirement, not sending in a passport sized photo, our passport into the Church is belief in Jesus Christ. The invitation is the Love of God that comes through you!

In Matthew 16:15-18 Jesus asked the Disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”**

To which **Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not overcome it.”**

What we belong to is God given, eternal and powerful. We belong to the Body of Christ and membership in that body is the belief that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**

And I think about the difference between these other places to belong versus what the Body of Christ has to offer. You can get an expensive cup of coffee in Starbucks and be a member of the community of the caffeinated. Or do one random act of kindness a week and belong to the Karma Army.

But we have a purpose that goes far beyond just random acts of kindness and buying coffee. And though we share coffee regularly on Sundays, we deliberately organize to go out together and do great things for God. We are far from random. We are Methodists!

Today we are recognizing people for their outstanding work with Students in Agua Prieta. Friday I got to tour some of Vista's Mission work up and down Oracle Road. I got to see the delivery of backpacks to Family First in Oracle.



We visited Loving Threads Community Clothing Bank



and the Food Bank and Impact Headquarters.

I learned of your work with pregnant teenagers, and Ten for Teens Program.



I learned how you feed the hungry, clothe the naked and even take care of the lonely through the new Senior Center. I marveled at the God given giftedness of those who ran these programs and you who support them.

These missions though large in their scope of impact are made up of individuals exercising their individual God given gifts from the gifts of “administration” to the gifts of “generosity of time and treasure.”

These missions and more are living out their God-given purpose laid out in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25 “to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the sick and those in prison and we all together “welcome the stranger in our midst,” each and every Sunday. For many we are, and for many we can be and become, that 3<sup>rd</sup> place to belong the sociologist spoke of.

We each have a gift to share with others. Each of our gifts is necessary for the health of the Body. Each and every one of us is important in the Body of Christ. All are important but none is all important. In our travels on Friday we discussed that we can’t solve all the world’s problems, but we can make a great difference in individual lives and homes. And together as the Body of Christ, the Church, we can make a great difference together than by ourselves. Our efforts are multiplied.

As our scripture says, **“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.”** Our mission committee and mission team areas and their leaders and helpers have God given gifts that are expanding God’s kingdom here on earth.

I want to close by making this very personal for you. In your baptism God has given you great gifts. God has given you all the gifts and talents you and the Church needs to thrive. And even before God gave you these spiritual gifts, God gave you the gift of life to use them and enjoy them.

The greatest gift God has given you is you!!! (Say this with me, **“The greatest gift God has given me is me!”**)

Where you are at any given moment in life, you have your greatest gift with you. Where ever you go you present your greatest gift. When you come to worship you present the greatest present God has given you back to God.

So when we gather together on Sunday, we actually bring the best we have to God. We bring what is better than what we wear, how we sing, or what we give financially.



We bring God’s greatest gift back to him to present at his altar.

The gathered body of Christ is a gathering of immense wealth, priceless wealth in the eyes of God for Jesus gave his life for the Church his body. We, the body of Christ, need to gather together before God and our gathering tells us all that all are important and none is all-important for we are members of one body.

Paul says, **“So that 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.**

Places to belong like the Karma Army, Starbucks and a 1000 other places will indeed make you a member and suck up every moment of your time, talent and treasure. But can they really be with you when you suffer and mourn? Can they really be with you when you are honored and rejoice? No, not like the Church can.

The challenging thing about the Body of Christ, the Local Church, is that it is not some institution out there to serve you.



The Body of Christ is you! The Body of Christ is as healthy as your commitment to serve it.

The Body of Christ is as powerfully mission-oriented as you deciding to use your gifts and talents in it.

The Body of Christ is as friendly and welcoming as you are. It's not those "somebodies" out there in an institution or on a committee.

**The Body of Christ is you!**

Again in the form of a Jeopardy question, **"How can I use the gift You have given me, God, to serve others?"**

In Jesus' Name Amen.