1 Corinthians 12:27 You are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.

In a way I have always found this text and the lesson that it gives a bit of a puzzle. Don’t get me wrong, I love the lesson. The lesson is still so pertinent even in today’s world. “We are the body of Christ. We are all one body but we are all different parts. We are to function and behave like one body and not like a couple of dozen parts.” That’s the lesson. One but many. And yet you kind of have to wonder why this lesson had to be taught, especially why did it have to be taught in the Christian church?

It’s not like the idea of this lesson wasn’t and isn’t well known in the world. You understood and knew this lesson if you were a member of the Roman army. As a member of the army, you had your job and your duties to do and you were expected to get them done. Everyone had his job and task to do. It was clear, not everyone was a General. Not everyone was a Tribune or a Centurion. Most were just regular soldiers. But everyone had a job to do and getting that job done was absolutely important. I can tell you that for centuries, Roman armies just didn’t lose any wars because of this discipline and because of the “get your job done” attitude.

And the same is true in today’s world. If you are a football fan you are no doubt watching the playoff games. The teams that win are the ones where everybody gets their job done. On the football field, the team that most consistently gets the job done for the most amount of time is usually going to win. That’s the way it is in every team sport. The team with the most players who can get the job done better than the next guy is usually the team that is going to have a winning season.

And if you don’t like the sports analogy then think in terms of health care. When all the doctors and nurses do their job to the best of their ability your chances of getting through your problem are greatly increased. But if that CAT scan technician doesn’t read the results right or the Doctor misses that one little line on your chart the results can be devastating and not to the Doctor but rather to you! If the janitor doesn’t scrub right, if the doctor doesn’t scrub right, the beds and rooms aren’t sanitized, the nurse misses your medication time, and on and on, the end results could be trouble. Everyone has to work together and when everyone does their best, then everyone gets the best care and results. If you understand all that I’ve just said, then you understand why our USA health care system is one of the best in the world.

So you see, we do grasp the point of this lesson in the world. We understand the importance of this lesson in the world. For that matter all of us in Michigan truly grasp this lesson. What happens when you have, as we all suspect, a culture of “just do mediocre?” It’s the difference between the Patriots who have 37 playoff wins and the Lions who have none since Wayne Fonts! We know the lesson. So why, why does the Apostle Paul have to spend so much time teaching this lesson to the members of a Church body? Well, it’s because of a thing called sin. Because we live in a world that has problems, deep problems and it seems that when it comes to the Church, those problems can often be amplified simply because Satan likes to do that to cause problems. Our theme will be: **THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

Now just to make sure you grasp all the more the importance of these words I am going to remind you that these words occur in chapter that starts out talking about the gifts that God and His Holy Spirit give to the church. We actually heard that reading last week. We can highlight the point of that reading by sharing with you certain verses. Verse 4-6 said, **“There are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of ministries, and yet the same Lord. There are various kinds of activity, but the same God, who produces all of them in everyone.”** After those words we are reminded of some of the specific gifts that God gives to his church with verse 11 concluding the section. **“One and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them to each one individually as he desires.”** I think that last line important. God gives the gifts. God gives them as He knows is best for the good. Everyone basically has at least one gift, some will have more as God sees fit.

Now just contemplate that thought. Everyone has at least one gift! Fact is, if you are here, then you do indeed have the gift of faith. God has called you to be his child and an heir of eternal life and salvation. Now, even with just this one gift, you have a role to play, you have a job to do in the kingdom of God and of Christ. Maybe your job is just to show up and sing loud, or encourage your fellow members, or in general just be a part of serving Jesus the best you can. Maybe your job is to make sure you are counted as “present” no matter what is going on. Fact is, everyone has at least the gift of faith, the gift that makes us children of God and heirs of eternal life, but even that miraculous gift has responsibilities and jobs that it can do in the service of Christ our Lord and Savior.

This fact is so important to remember. Paul is talking about the body being many parts and yet being one body because of this issue of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You can’t separate this lesson from the previous one. In other words, once you grasp that God has given you gifts, then what we have heard in our lesson for today has pertinence and importance. It starts: **“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we all were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free people, and we were caused to drink one Spirit.”**

Again note that lesson. We are many and yet we are one. We are united in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. No matter who you are, fact is, Jesus gave his life for you. Jesus rose from the dead for you. Jesus paid the price of eternal damnation for you. It is those things that unite us. It is Jesus that unites us. We are united by the Gospel in word and sacrament. We are united in our worship and praise of Jesus. We are united in our singing, our prayers for each other and with each other. We are united in our offerings, and our striving together. We have become members of the household of Jesus, his brothers and sisters simply excited to be a part and simply excited to do our part. All of this in Jesus.

Then comes the next part. **“Furthermore, the body is not one member, but many. 15If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body,” it does not on that account cease to be part of the body. 16If the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body,” it does not on that account cease to be part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18But now God has arranged the members in the body, each and every one of them, as he desired. 19If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20But as it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need for you,” or again the head to the feet, “I have no need for you.” 26So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**

Now honestly, I don’t think there is a single person here or reading these words who doesn’t grasp the point. In order for this body, this Church, to serve and glorify the Lord for his gracious gift of salvation there needs to be unity. We can’t spend our time arguing about being a foot or a hand or an eye or an ear. We can’t spend our time dickering about it should be this way or it should be that way especially if it is something God’s Word doesn’t specifically address. For instance, when we were working on expanding our facility, it is true, there were other ideas out there, but finally the majority of the congregation settled on the plan that we did. Because in truth, there is not a section of God’s Word that tells us how or when or why we should improve or make changes in our physical plant. We did that as members united in Christ Jesus. Note that you did it well. Not only did you build an awesome facility that improved your service to each other, but you worked hard to make sure that it was taken care of. It is a tribute to your unity in Christ that you not only built it but paid it off 6 years ahead of time. Not everyone contributed big bucks, some of us could only give little bucks but together look at what we did! That’s working together!

This working together is about sharing Jesus too! Not all of us are called to be the Pastor. Not all of us are geared to writing sermons, teaching Bible classes, confirmation classes, visiting the sick and shut-ins, or counseling the troubled. And yet, there are many of us who could visit and encourage our various members. There are many of us who can invite and share the wonder of our Savior with your neighbors or family members. Fact is, there are those of us who can send bulletins and sermons, share the sermon online and just generally be an encouragement to the work of the Gospel that does go on. You are a part of the body of Christ. You have a job as a member of that body. Well, get that job done! Why? Because of Jesus!

Now, please, I want you to really think about this illustration that we are given. Not a single one of us in unimportant. To illustrate that, think of the person who has broken their little toe. Not a big part. Not even an illustrious part, but if you have ever had a broken little toe, you know how it can impact what you do and hinder what you want to do. It doesn’t seem big, but it is still important. So in the Church, so here at St. Paul. When we work together, doing our part whatever that may be, when we function, we do the work and ministry of our Lord Jesus all the better.

Now the question is, are all of us doing what we can? Are all of us taking our part? Because in truth, that is the issue here. The Holy Spirit has to address this problem because the members of the Corinthian congregation had caused divisions and obstacles among themselves. In truth, they were not acting as a united Church in Christ but had become divided. What were the divisions? One was over who was serving them. You know, “My guy is Apollos. My guy is Paul. My guy is Cephas. My guy is Jesus.” Yet Paul retorts: **“Is Christ divided?”** The point is simple. Jesus is the Lord of the Church. Jesus is the one who is responsible through a divine call for the man who is serving you. It is not an issue of whether or not YOU like his preaching style, his personality or any other quirks about him. Frankly, it doesn’t matter if YOU think he is doing a good job, bad job, inadequate job and so forth. As long as he is preaching and teaching the truth and wonder of Jesus as our Savior from sin, as long as the Gospel in Word and sacrament is among you and Jesus is the foundation…He is the man whom God has sent you! Support him, support his work, support the Church, be a part of helping him cause Jesus to shine and be glorified! He was called as the Pastor by the Holy Spirit! To do anything else is to be the foot crying it is not a hand or an eye crying it is not an ear.

Please note verse 26 at this point. **“So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”** Here is the easy illustration of what this is saying. If the eye doesn’t help the hand or foot, then it is a lot tougher to walk and do things. If the hand refuses to feed the mouth, it is a lot tougher to be healthy and whole. In the same way, when all are working together, what wonders can be done! Again, you built a beautiful facility to better serve the people of St. Paul. And if that was all you had accomplished that would have been awesome in itself. You built it, paid it off and did you take note of all the other things that happened too? The recording system you put in, the new carpet, the cement work all around the building, the altar candle stands, new altar cloth for Advent, and a number of other things that were done. You accomplished all of those things while paying off your building and still seeing to it that the ministry of the Gospel was carried forth. And I will even mention that you, by working together, have to this point provided the Church at large with 6 full time called workers to serve the souls of the WELS.

Is there more to do? Of course! The work never stops. I will tell you the work is getting harder. Every single Christian denomination is losing numbers like crazy. Our children are leaving the church because the world has them by the tail. Satan seems to be getting the upper hand as the world scoffs at, belittles our Savior and as Satan helps the world to undermine in every way the wonder and marvel of God’s Word and the salvation it gives. Society is breaking down, inflation is rampant, and godlessness prevails. Doesn’t matter. There is work to do. You have your work to do! Maybe that work is to do nothing more than to make sure you are in worship, you are praying for God’s will to be done, you are getting your offering in, and in whatever way you can, you are being a voice for Jesus by sharing bulletins and sermons and the simple wonder of the Savior you know.

The lesson of this chapter is so important. We have gifts from our Lord and Savior. We have been called to be a part of Jesus and his work, yes, to be his body to this world. **“You are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.”** Let us be united in Jesus. Let us work to serve our Jesus. Let us be his hands and feet, eyes and ears, his toes and fingers that His glory be served. Amen.