

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
Sunday, January 16, 2022
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12: 1-31

Sermon: Body Building

In 2012 the movie, *The Avengers*, came out. It is a story of a group of superheroes that banded together to battle an evil force that was bent on world domination. The only problem was, these superheroes had a hard time working together.

For about the first half of the movie, they were each caught up in their own agendas. They squabbled. They backbit. They distrusted each other's motives. As a result, they had a difficult time accomplishing anything together.

The bad guy was smart enough to anticipate this divisiveness among the good guys. He actually counted on their lack of unity in order to accomplish his diabolical plan. He almost won, because the Avengers failed to realize that it took all of them, each using his or her own gifts, in order to defeat the enemy.

At one point, when it looks as though the team has fallen apart, Agent Nick Fury, their leader, says to them, "The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people, see if they could become something more. See if they could work together when we needed them to and to fight the battles that we never could."

That pretty much describes God's plan for His church. God wants us to work together as a team using our gifts and strengths against evil and to have unity in our diversity. Unfortunately, the first half of *The Avengers* movie pretty much describes the way it often works out for churches. Many churches don't work together as a team using each person's gifts and talents. This is the way the church in Corinth was working. It was out of balance and some were thinking they were more important and needed more than others in the body. The spiritual gifts had become points of pride for the Corinthians. There's no place for personal pride in the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are to be used to strengthen, encourage, comfort and grow the body of Christ. The body of Christ in Corinth was as diverse in its composition, Jews, Greeks, slave and free, as it was in its giftedness. The Apostle Paul emphasized what brings the body together: we are baptized into one Spirit, and sustained by one Spirit.

The image isn't of every part of the body doing the same thing, but every part of the body contributing to the same purpose. In a symphony, everyone plays different instruments, but they are all playing the same piece of music.

Imagine, Jesus, the Master Carpenter's tools holding a meeting because they are having a difficult time working together and are arguing with each other: Brother Hammer presides, but several suggest he leave the meeting because he is too noisy. Brother Hammer replies, "If I have to leave this shop, Brother Screw must go also. You have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything." Brother Screw speaks up. "If you wish, I'll leave. But Brother Plane must leave too. All his work is on the surface. His efforts have no depth." To this, Brother Plane responds, "Brother Rule will also have to withdraw, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right." Brother Rule then complains about Brother Sandpaper: "He ought to leave, too, because he's so rough and always rubbing people the wrong way. On and on goes the discord.

In the midst of all this discussion, in walks the Carpenter of Nazareth. He has arrived to start his day's work. Putting on his apron, he goes to the bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the gospel. He uses Brothers Hammer, Screw, Plane, Rule, Sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work, when the pulpit is finished, Brother Saw rises and remarks, "Brethren, I observe that all of us are workers together with the Lord."

So, it is with the Body of Christ. We all are not only important; we are essential to being the body and working together to serve the Lord. If our hands take the day off, how shall we eat? If our eyes decide to go on strike, what keeps us from bumping into things? If our feet decide to resign, how shall we move? We are part of a team and everyone has something they can contribute.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul states the truth of our need to accept our differences and to recognize these differences as essential to the functioning of the whole. Our differences are not to create divisions between us but to emphasize the unity among us. There are many parts because there are many needs. Without the various parts, some needs would not be fulfilled.

The important point is that God has given us different and unique gifts and we all are important to the body and we need each other. Jesus is the head and we are the body. Each part is indispensable and each member is interdependent.

Take, for example, the simple act of speaking. Speech is possible only when the brain, nerves, tongue, jaws, lips, larynx, lungs, diaphragm, heart, veins, arteries, and capillaries all work together for that specific purpose. What appears on the surface to be the work of only one part of the body is actually many members of the body working together.

God has placed each one of you here at this time and this place of Elmer Presbyterian Church to be an important member of the body and to serve using your gifts and talents. We need each other and all your gifts and talents are needed. We are all interconnected and what affects one member of the body is felt by all of the members.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." We are all related. When something happens to one member of our body, whether it is good or bad, all of the other members of the body respond accordingly. We must share in the experiences of one another. Join others in their grief and in their joy. We need each other and we need to work together in this new year of 2022. Each person is indispensable, interdependent and interconnected. It is only when we see ourselves as members of one body and strive to act as one body in the Spirit, that we will experience health and growth as a body.

We are diverse but the Spirit wants us to work united with believers around the world. We are all part of the same team, the same body, because Christ has changed our lives and given us a new purpose.

In Ephesians 4:14-16 it teaches us, "We will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new

teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of the body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 reminds us that “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.”

Our Spiritual Gifts are meant to honor God and bring glory to Him. Our gifts are not meant to be used selfishly but for the benefit of the Body of Christ and of others. Remember, we do not earn our gifts. They are given to us because of God’s Mercy and Grace and Love.

If you are a foot, are you serving the body to take it where it needs to go? If you’re a hand are you serving the body with your ability to provide for other’s needs? If you’re an ear are you serving the body by listening and learning? If you’re an eye, are you serving the body by seeing where the body needs to go?

The Bible teaches that we need to surrender our lives to Christ by faith. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. God loves us and has a magnificent plan for our lives, for your life. Use your gifts for the service of the Lord this year and encourage others around you to do the same.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what a privilege we have to be “Body Builders” for Christ—standing together, working together, suffering together, rejoicing together and serving the Lord together as the Body of Christ.

One thing that makes a church more than just a bunch of talented people is the death and resurrection of Christ. Everything we do points to the sacrifice Christ made for us, and the reality of His resurrection. Without that, we would just be a group of talented people. But because of the resurrection, and the power of Christ that works within us, we are gifted people, brought together into one body, one Spirit, for one purpose.