

Sermon: Common Purpose

Text: For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. – 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

January 23, 2022

Mission Sunday

Christian Ko Choi

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

Our Scripture comes from Paul's first letter to Corinth, chapter 12:12-31. We will read it in two parts. In the earlier part of the same chapter, Paul shares the varieties of spiritual gifts which God bestows upon all of us through the Holy Spirit to do a common good. Today's Scripture focuses on the unity among the various spiritual empowered members of the body. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

¹² 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. ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would 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. ¹⁶ And if the ear would 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. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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." Amen.

As we continue our reading from 1 Corinthians, listen particularly for the common purpose and how we are called to use our gifts. Hear now the latter portion of today's Scripture that God has prepared for us to hear.

²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ 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; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us pray: Holy and loving God, who calls us and loves us, we ask for your heart to be illuminated from these pages that we may hear the words that will strengthen and sustains us through your Holy Spirit. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

I want to start this morning with a memory from my high school math class. Following question was given to the class to solve; if you want to get from your side of the river to the other side by the lighthouse on a rowboat, what would be the easiest way to get there? Obviously, the question was aiming to teach us and asking us to apply the steady flowrate of the river and set the angle to which we need to set the boat for the shortest route. As most of us understood the question's intentions, we started to do our calculations, but one of my classmates raised his hand without hesitation to give an answer. Not expecting an answer so quickly yet curious, you all know how kids give interesting answers, my teacher called on him and he did not disappoint. My friend answered, "you simply have to keep your eyes fixed on the lighthouse and row. As long as you keep your eyes and boat pointed towards where you want to go, the varying current of the river would be corrected with each and every stroke." Although my friend missed the intent of the question, he understood the purpose of one's journey, and that was to reach the shore by the lighthouse.

Today's passage is a well-known passage, one of my favorite ones, telling us that we are united as the body of Christ. Often when we read this passage, like the math problem, we look for the intent rather than the purpose. We are quick to see that the body has many parts, that each member is created with a unique intent. Eye is for seeing, ear is for hearing, nose should smell, that we should honor each member with their talents and that there should be no part of the body that is more important than the other. And yes, it is true that diversity is important and the Scripture tells us that each of us are unique; fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator with talents and gifts that God has chosen for us. And yes, we are all baptized into one body through the one Spirit, and yet today's passage begs me to ask - for what purpose? What is our common purpose as one body of Christ with multiple parts, multiple intentions, and multiple gifts? What is our mission?

Two years ago... which might seem so distant already, but some of us remember it like it was yesterday. Members of our first international mission team were in Kenya, meeting our Kenyan brothers and sisters in Christ. The moment we landed in Nairobi, it was obvious we were in a different place. We looked different, dressed different, even noticed English that was being spoken was different. There was no doubt there were noticeable differences between us. We came with the intention of completing the building and installation of a church and a school. However, as we spent time together in Kenya, something intrinsic within us started to change as they shared their food and hospitality with us. As we started to see beyond the differences, we felt something that connected us

with them that still is present within us that were part of that journey; a longing to experience once again... and that was the common purpose of loving God and to serve one another – all of God’s creation. The intentional mission of helping people of Kenya became a purposeful mission of worshipping and serving one another, as today’s Scripture telling us, “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (v.26). Do not get me wrong, I know it was physically draining, yet what I remember of the experience is nothing but joy - seeing the faces brightly light up; sharing of hearts even though we come from different backgrounds; building relationships with a common purpose of having one faith, one hope and one Lord in mind; and breaking bread together – I will admit at first it tasted bad, as it was something we were not used to, but as we got used to it, we tasted the love within that food made for us. As you recall Bob Fox’s report, he came back with a Kenyan brother in his heart. It is all because we were also the recipient of their mission towards us; to show generosity and hospitality, to witness joy in the midst of strife, passion for the gospel (every worship was filled with joy and dancing), and the amount of faith that challenged us... no – *DARED us* – to go deeper.

Friends, our mission, our common purpose, is to share God’s love with all God’s creation. “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” (v. 13). Our mission, our common purpose, from globally to regionally, from our neighborhood to engage with individuals, is to see beyond our differences and share God’s love with our given gifts and serve all of God’s creation. Our mission, our common purpose at Westminster is carried out through each and every one of us – the church, as we live out our lives faithfully in our daily walks, with our everyday interactions. Greeting each other with a smile – even under our masks, opening doors, being generous, kind, and going the extra mile. As a visible body of Christ, we address hunger by serving meals at the shelter and those who needs assistance with circumstances in their lives; give hope and food security by maintaining the little pantry at Graham Elementary. We serve our neighborhood and community by choosing to be at the corner of Edwards and Walnut as a visible witness of God’s love to others, to reassure to the world that God is still at work among us and in the world. We acknowledge the suffering of those facing social and economic injustices as work towards equity and justice through empowerment and supporting education. As we say often in worship, Westminster believes we are in the world for ministry (no person or God’s creation is left behind): a ministry of sharing God’s love to all, and we are ever so grateful that all of you are partners in that ministry. Last year, we have used near quarter million dollars for our mission efforts, but that does not summarize who we are because it does not include insurmountable hours of dedication, prayers, and God’s love we as the collective have shared.

Beloved, let us keep our spiritual eyes fixed at our missional, common purpose to be being like David – who was a person after God’s own heart and sharing God’s love. Let us also be open to be ministered to and being a recipient of other’s missional work to join in on their joy, to cause a change within us, to ask God to further equip us, and to be challenged or even perhaps dared to express God’s love in a deeper way. Let our doors of the church be a way to service. As one of my previous churches had a sign above its doors – it said, “you are now entering your mission field” – may we too be the missionaries who shares God’s love to all whom we encounter today and every day of our lives.

Amen.