

The Body of Christ

Frankton – 9/13/15

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12.14-20 many parts, one body

Proposition: We are all different tiles in the mosaic of Christ's church.

The Greek word for church is [SLIDE] "ekklesia, which means "a people called out." What I love about that definition is that it has nothing to do with a building. Church in America is usually viewed as a brick building with a cross on top sitting at the corner of Main and Elm streets. That's not what the church of the New Testament was. The church of the New Testament was a group of people with the power of Jesus in them unleashing grace on anyone and everyone they encountered. That means, when you leave "church" after this service, the church is leaving the building. The church isn't a building; it's people. The church isn't a dead club; it's a living organism.

Sometimes, grasping this radical concept is difficult. That's because we hear from some people who have been saved something like the following story. "Hi. My name is John. I was an alcoholic and a porn addict for about 30 years. Then I found Jesus and he saved me. Since then, I've never thought about a drop of alcohol nor pornography since. Now my days are filled with praise and worship while helping the less fortunate, 24/7". First of all, does he have a job and does he ever sleep? I think some Christians who are on the receiving end of this soliloquy wonder why it didn't happen that way with them. They have to wonder, "Why do I still struggle with lust, this guy doesn't? How come I still have the desire to do some of those things I used to do, but now know they are wrong? If I don't have that guy's kind of story, does that mean I'm really not saved? Did it somehow not take with me? Did I do something wrong?"

Call me jaded, but I don't think it normally works the way that man's soliloquy described. I don't think, at least for the vast majority of us, that the moment we give our lives to Jesus, we stop wanting to do all those not-so-Christian things we were doing before beginning our Christian journey. And I think that the vast majority of church-goers would agree with me that those who say it comes as easy as saying "I believe," are at best clueless or at worst lying and are just acting good. I don't think a church is a place to act. In fact, I think the church is a place where we can drop our act, and just be our sinning self. The church is a place to be transparent and vulnerable. The church is a place to take off the mask we wear. [SLIDE] The church is a place you can be yourself. The church is not a club for good people. The church is a hospital for the broken. Jesus wasn't trying to create a place to show off his shiny employees; he wanted a place where his children could be healed.

Remember when you first met the person who is closest to you now, whether it's a spouse or a good friend or whoever? Just think for a minute about the beginning stage of that relationship. How did you meet that person? Was it random or a set-up. How did you get to know them? Did you go out for coffee or a Coke? When did you get to the point of actually feeling like you knew this person? Jan and I met at a Madison Heights High School football game (GO Pirates!). We kept meeting there for a few weeks then I asked her to go to the game with me. We continued dating through the end of football season and through basketball season. We learned a lot about

each other as we talked on our dates. (This was long before you could stalk somebody by “googling” them.)

Now imagine what would have happened if, when I met Jan, I just concentrated on one part of her and that one part was her toe. What if, on our dates as we were trying to get to know each other, I would only stare at her toe? Talk to her toe? Listen to her toe? I know, that sounds a little hokey, maybe even kinky. So, first of all, if you ever see me doing that, call the cops. Second, would obsessing over her toe give me a complete picture of who Jan really is? Of course not. To get to know someone fully, you just can't concentrate on / obsess over one part of them. You work toward knowing the whole of them.

That's what Paul is talking about in today's scripture. Paul writes: [SLIDE] *Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part...* [14] *There are many parts, but only one body.* [20] Paul is making it clear that when we become Christians, we become part of Jesus' body. His mission for his church is for it to become his body. We aren't representing ourselves; we are representing Jesus. This also means Christianity isn't as individualistic as some people would have us to think. While Christianity is intensely personal, it is not private. After trusting in Jesus, we are immediately joined together in something greater than ourselves, the church.

[SLIDE] If the church is Jesus' body, then to know who Jesus is, you need to know the church. In the same way that obsessing over Jan's toe in order to get to know her is ridiculous, it is also ridiculous to look at one individual or part of the body of Christ to get a good picture of who Jesus is. In fact, if we just stare at the toe of Jesus, we will probably get a really poor picture of who he is. Toes are messy and gross – just as we are messy individuals. But all of us together make up the picture of Jesus. Different functions. Different gifts. Different jobs. Different parts of the body. We can't say we love Jesus and not the church, which is Jesus' body, because that's like cutting off someone's body and saying you love a decapitated head. That's gross AND weird! To love someone and know that person fully, you must know their entire self.

Here's a description of when I think the church may be at one of its best modes. Picture a 70 year-old, upper middle class business man in his three-piece suit shouting praise songs to Jesus while he is standing right next to a 19 year-old, saggy-pants-wearing teen age boy with his arm full of ink and his hat on backwards. Both worshipping Jesus. Both a part of the church. Both glorifying God. That is what the church is supposed to be. It has to be church when the only thing that is bringing diverse people into the same room is their love for Jesus. Not their jobs. Not their socioeconomic status. Not their races. Not their gender preference. But their love for Jesus. That's when you know it's the church.

For me, the best part about the church is that God has uniquely wired it as his vehicle to heal and offer grace to hurting people. The church is the shelter from the storms. When we look at the church in this way, we see its failures differently. A lot of people like to sit on the outside, call the church a place full of hypocrites, and throw the church's sins in its face. And I get that. But what I don't get is when people inside the church start casting aspersions at others inside the church. As Jesus followers we are all part of the one body. That means when there is a problem in his body, the church, we lend our part of the body to the healing process. How stupid would it look if when someone broke a hand, the foot started criticizing the hand? That's what we look like when we

Christians begin to criticize the church. One part of the body should lend itself to the healing process of another. That's love. That's the gospel. And that is Jesus.

The difference between a critic and a servant is how they approach a problem. A critic stands back and points out the problem; a servant rolls up his or her sleeves and helps solve the problem. The worst part is when criticism come from within the same body. A lot of Christians like to lob grenades at one another rather than bear one another's burdens in love. We often don't realize the damage we are causing. [SLIDE] When Christ's body is divided, who bleeds? [SLIDE] Answer: Jesus. When Christians fight among themselves, Jesus is the one whose reputation is damaged and bruised. Imagine the pain, blood and damage if an arm divided against itself. That's what it's like when Christians fight each other. But when a church is being the church, it is a family atmosphere and a place of safety. A place where we help heal each other's hurt and grief. A place of strength.

In the New Testament, the church was seen as completely radical in its time. The poor and rich didn't mingle in society, but they did in church. Gentiles and Jews wouldn't associate in society, but they did in church. Men and women weren't equal in society, but they were in church. That's the church Jesus came to bring, and that's the church we are a part of if we have trusted him. All racial, societal, political, and financial walls were abolished. We are all one in Jesus.

At our deepest level, we all have an incredible desire to just be known. To be accepted. To be loved. It calls us. It beckons us. It whispers to us. It offers that place. Come to Jesus and then come to his body. Trying to live without the community is like trying to live without oxygen. We weren't created to do it. There is nothing more freeing than being able to gather regularly with people who see us without our masks. Without the hiding. Without the act. We all come in with baggage. We all come in trying to find our way. We all come in with broken edges. In the same way that a [SLIDE] mosaic is made up of broken ragged and dirty pieces of tile, so the church is made up of broken, ragged and dirty people. But when you zoom out and see the whole picture, [SLIDE] you see something beautiful. Broken people living together is a beautiful picture.

I heard a story a while back about some friends who went swimming in a river in the northwest. It was spring and the glacier runoff made the river pretty dangerous. Nonetheless one of the guys jumped in. He got caught in the current and was taken to the dangerous part of the rapids. One of his friends on the shore was a lifeguard, and all the other friends looked at him to do something. He just stood there, though not moving, just staring at his friend. The others began to panic and yell at him and tell him to go save their friend. Still nothing. They looked out into the river and saw their friend struggling desperately. In an instant, the struggle stopped. He could no longer fight the currents and began to drown. When that happened the lifeguard friend jumped in and with a few swift strokes rescued the drowning friend and brought him to shore. With the adrenaline wearing off, the group yelled at the lifeguard, "Why didn't you jump in earlier? He could have died?" The life guard calmly looked at them and said, "I had to wait until he fully gave up. Unless he stopped fighting, he would have dragged me under and drowned me with him. But the minute he gave up, I could save him."

That's the way it is with Jesus, he just wants us to surrender, and when we do, he comes and gets us. The wave might be crashing overhead, but in the moment when it looks like we might die, his grace scoops us up and brings us life. And because we finally give up, we know it was Jesus who

did all the saving and not anything we did. Are you ready to surrender? Or maybe for some of you the question is, "Are you ready to surrender again?" I don't know where you are coming from, but I know Jesus has a better plan for your life than you do. He is a better king of your life than you are. No one has caused me more shame, guilt, pain and suffering than I have. He knows that, and he still rescues me anyway. He can do the same for you. Just come as you are. If you're ready to give up, or give up again, come forward and let's pray...