



## Sermon by Synod Minister Seyward Ask

June 2025

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### 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Our scripture reading comes from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, beginning with the 12<sup>th</sup> verse:

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many members yet one body. <sup>21</sup>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." <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>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, <sup>24</sup>whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. <sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup>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. <sup>29</sup>Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work powerful deeds? <sup>30</sup>Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup>But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

When you hear the word "church," what picture comes to mind? Maybe it's a building with a steeple and stained glass, or a group of people holding coffee

cups in the fellowship hall. Maybe it's a choir, or a Zoom screen full of familiar faces. Today, the Apostle Paul invites us to picture something else entirely: a body. Not a metaphor. Not a symbol. A living, breathing body—with hands and feet, elbows and ears, bones and ligaments—all connected.

And he doesn't say we're *like* a body—he says we *are* one. “You are the body of Christ,” he writes. Not someday. Not ideally. Right now.

It's kind of a strange image when you think about it, but it's also incredibly powerful. A body is something alive. It functions best when all its parts are working together. And if even one part is hurting or missing, the whole body feels it. That's how Paul wants us to understand what it means to be the church.

In our society today we often celebrates individualism and independence—pull yourself up, make your own way, don't rely on anyone else. But Paul turns that on its head. In Christ, we're not meant to be separate, self-sufficient parts. We're meant to be connected—intimately, lovingly, necessarily.

If one part suffers, all suffer. If one is honored, all rejoice. What happens to you matters to me. What happens to me matters to you. It's a completely different way of being in the world.

And yet, it's not always easy to live this way. It can be so easy to compare ourselves to each other. To say, "Well, I'm not as gifted as she is," or "I don't have anything special to offer." He writes, "If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less part of the body."

You've felt that, haven't you? That quiet voice that says, *I'm not enough. I don't have what it takes. I don't belong here.*

Maybe you don't preach or sing in the choir or serve on a committee. Maybe your energy is limited. Maybe your faith has been through some things and doesn't look the way it used to. And maybe you wonder if you still count.

But Paul says no part of the body is unnecessary. No part is more holy or more important. You're part of the body *because God placed you here*. Not because you're perfect or talented or impressive, but because you are beloved. You matter. Your presence matters. Your gifts matter.

A few years ago, a friend of mine invited a group of people to help out with a community garden event. There were maybe 15 or 20 volunteers, a mix of adults, some teens, and a few kids running around with shovels.

Someone asked, “Who’s in charge here?” And my friend just smiled and said, “You know what you’re good at. Do that.”

And people did. One of the teenagers who didn’t really want to talk fixed a broken hose without being asked. A woman who was newer to town started greeting people with the warmth of someone who had lived there her whole life. An older man with knee pain pulled out a chair and helped direct traffic from the shade. Someone chased the kids, someone brought snacks, someone swept up the mess. No one did everything. But together, they did enough.

That is the body of Christ. It wasn’t slick or polished. It wasn’t organized like a well-oiled machine. But it worked. It was full of life and joy and mutual care. And no one had to be anything other than who they were.

Paul goes even further in this passage. He says that the parts of the body that seem “weaker” are actually indispensable. The ones we tend to overlook are the ones we should treat with even greater honor.

That flips the script, doesn’t it? We tend to value the loudest voices, the most visible roles, the people up front. But God sees differently. The quiet encouragers, the faithful prayers, the caregivers, the ones who show up even

when they're tired or uncertain—these are the ones holding the whole thing together.

In my first call I served a church where there was an older woman named Diane. She had arthritis and didn't get around easily. She used to be much more active but now couldn't volunteer for much anymore. But every Sunday, she sat in her row in the sanctuary and smiled at everyone who walked by. And every week, she wrote cards—sometimes five or more—to people who were sick, grieving, or just going through something. More than once, I heard someone say, “That card from Diane came at just the right time.” She wasn't loud. She wasn't flashy. But she was the quiet and steady heartbeat of that community.

You see, being the body of Christ isn't about doing it all. It's about offering what you can and trusting that others will do the same. It's about remembering that we're not whole unless everyone is included. It's about honoring the differences and embracing the diversity of the gifts among us.

Paul ends this passage by saying, “Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” You are part of this—right now. And not just you as an individual. *We* are the body. The fullness of Christ becomes visible not in isolation but in relationship. In love. In working together.

So this week, I invite you to take a look around. Notice the people in your faith community—the ones you know well, and the ones you haven't really met yet. Notice the different ways people serve, care, pray, laugh, show up. And then consider this: where might your part fit in? What gifts might you have to offer, even if they feel small?

Because the truth is, there is no “small” in the body of Christ. Every heartbeat matters. Every voice matters. Every part belongs. Thanks be to God. Amen.