

2024 Synod Assembly Theme Series

Reflection #3



Body.

Fractured, broken bodies: oh, how they hurt! Maybe you have known the pain of a broken bone, aging joints, threatening disease, or serious surgery. Last month, my husband underwent knee replacement surgery, which is a pretty violent procedure; it requires work to gain strength and move forward! No matter who we are, we have known the pain of injury to these beautiful, vulnerable human bodies. At its best, the skills and miracles of modern medicine work wonders, but sometimes we come to a point when there is no cure, there is no therapy, there is no repair for these fragile human bodies.

“One Body in Christ”

This week, I’m writing about another kind of body – the body of Christ, which is the church. Why? Because St. Paul likens the church to the human body:

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. (1 Corinthians 12)

And then, Paul goes on to point out the importance of the various parts of our bodies – feet, ears, eyes, hands – each is important and necessary, each honored. Why?

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.

Paul’s teaching begins with the fact that the Holy Spirit blesses God’s precious people with a variety of gifts, and each one is important, each one is essential for health. In Paul’s time, people were bragging about their own gift and putting down the gifts of others. Back then, speaking in tongues was a gift that many felt was the greatest gift of all. In our congregations, I’m not so sure that this is the gift people would brag-on, or even claim to have experienced.

But we certainly know how hard it is to see the strengths of different gifts among the differences of other human beings, even in the church. We have our own ways of lifting-up ourselves and putting down others in the body of Christ. Call it sin. Call it thinking we earn our way into God’s favor. You know what it’s like. Some days, we can relate to Paul’s reflection when he wrote to the Corinthians,

It has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? (1 Corinthians 1:11-13)

Every church I know wants to say that they are the most welcoming church around. But division is not welcoming. And new people can spot division a mile away. How? These are some of the ways others pick up on the undercurrents in our churches:

- smiles only for the “long-time members”
- gossiping
- putting down someone else’s ideas
- bullying
- pointing to a previous pastor and saying that those were our best days
- making parking lot decisions
- talking about other people, rather than talking TO them.

Eeuw! That’s not fun to think about. But it exists, dear friends, and my concern is that the divisiveness that is permeating our communities and country right now, might not do harm to the people of our churches and communities, and that the church might show the world a better way. It’s an election year. Divisions will only deepen. And the church, my dear people, has a calling like never before to live a different way: the way of Christ.

Living as the church, the body of Christ, is not something we invent ourselves. This body receives its oneness from the grace and power of God. As Paul also says,

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph, 4:4-5)

What a gift we have received in our baptism into the Triune God! What good news we have to live!

- 5 These are the stories that Jesus imparts,
filled with the Spirit who joins us as one.
Born through our voices, our hands, and our hearts,
this is a new world where God's will is done.

Hymn: What Is the World Like Text: Adam M. L. Tice, b. 1979
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For conversation:

- What are some of the gifts of the people gathered around your meeting table or the Table of Holy Communion?
- How might each person you meet be a gift to you in some way?
- How is your congregation as the body of Christ living out its call to “Live in harmony with one another” (Romans 12:6)? And what does that say to people who know you, or don’t know you yet?

+ grace and peace,
Bishop Dee Pederson

2024 Synod Assembly Theme Series - Reflection #2



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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