

Epiphany 3-January 23, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

## “All Members of the Body”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Our living room is pretty well back in order now. Our daughter and her family have settled into their new home and unless we have grandchildren stopping by for a visit, the toys stay in the toy room. The last evidence of Christmas to be seen in our living room was our Christmas tree that just was undecorated this week and taken outside to be burned. It's pretty safe to say that the biggest mess that happens in this room in our home happens when our children and grandchildren gather for our family Christmas. The cause of this mess and chaos come from the gifts that are given and opened. We no longer even attempt to control the opening of these gifts to manage some of the mess and chaos like we used to by opening one gift at a time starting with the youngest child to the oldest adult and then going through that process again until all gifts have been opened. So, this year, we passed out the gifts and let the grandchildren have a free for all until they opened all their gifts. The opening of gifts is a joy to watch but ends in a mess.

The gifts that were given were good gifts. In some cases, the gifts were pleasant and completely unexpected surprises. Some gifts were exactly what had been asked for, but some were still surprised that such a generous gift was given. And sometimes the gifts that were given with good intentions were not received with the joy that the giver had hoped to see. However, it wasn't long before the joy of receiving gifts was overcome with outright fights of claiming rights over the gifts and an unwillingness to share what they have received with siblings or cousins. It isn't long before our one family seems to be broken up into its many members.

This is what was happening with the congregation in Corinth. The wonderful receiving of gifts had turned into a great mess. The people who had received gifts were unwilling to share what was given to them because they had forgotten they weren't theirs to begin with. As they looked around at the gifts of other people, they started to compare these gifts and rank them according to what they felt was more important. The gifts that had been received caused division rather than serve as a source of unity. The focus was on the many members rather than the one body.

It takes many members of a body to function well. But the Apostle Paul makes clear that not everyone has been given the same gifts, so we need to welcome the gifts that other people have rather than be envious of them. I was reading this text for today on Monday morning at the

conclusion of the local news. The end of the news was highlighting some of the sporting events from the weekend. There was a video clip from a hockey game and from one of Sunday football games. The video from the hockey match showed a fight that broke out on the ice with punches being thrown and people landing on the hard ice. The video from the football game also showed hard tackles with players flying into the air after a hard hit and landing on the turf. As I watched this, I thought that I had all the members necessary to suit up for either of these activities. I have feet for skates and cleats. I have shoulders for pads. I have arms to hold onto a hockey stick or to throw or catch a football. I have the members that are necessary, but even if I had been given the gift to participate in such events, the gift is long since gone. It would only take a short time for me to end up with broken members if I attempted the easiest participation in such events.

There is another problem that can happen with gifts, and I was guilty of this with one of the gifts I received for Christmas this year. Kim asked me just the other day what I had done with the gift she had given me. I told her that I hid it. She gave me what I think is called an Air Pod Pro. I wasn't exactly sure what it was when I opened it, but I noticed my sons-in-laws were jealous of them, so I hid them until last night. I finally realized the wonderful benefit of these wireless earbuds and will use this gift without fearing what others thought about them.

The division that was created between the people of Corinth by the many gifts they had received needed to be addressed by the preacher Paul. He reminded them that having many gifts was not the problem, the gifts were a good thing. He told them not to be envious of another's gift and emphasized to them that they should not consider one gift to be more important than another. He did not want these people to hide their gifts from each other, but to use them so that others would also benefit from them. The division that was created was because they had forgotten the Giver of these gifts. Instead of saying "Thank you" when they realized they had a gift, they said, "This one is mine" just like our grandchildren often do after opening gifts.

Today in our annual meetings, several people will be given titles to serve our congregations much like those Paul mentioned in this lesson for today. Some will accept positions to serve as presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, treasurers, trustees, and deacons for our congregations. We are thankful for these people, but just as Paul concludes in this scripture for today, this list of people with gifts is not a complete list. Everyone. Everyone is a member of this body of Christ and what gives us unity is what Paul said at the very beginning of this lesson to the Corinthians and to us today. We are ALL one body in Christ because we were all baptized into one body.

Let us be thankful for each of the gifts that we all have. Let us not hide them but be willing to share them for the benefit of others today and always. Let us all be reminded that all we have is not ours but has been given to us. Let our gifts not cause division among us, but instead bind us together into the one body of Jesus Christ. Amen