

Because God First Loved Us

Week 3: "Belonging to the Body"

OPENING

Begin your conversation by asking each group member to share their name, and—if they were to think of the church as a human body—what body part they are most like, and why? For instance, are you the lungs or heart, pumping air/energy into the body? Or are you the ribcage, protecting/standing up for more vulnerable members? Or a foot, a solid foundation that helps the body move in the right direction? Have fun with this!

SCRIPTURE

Invite a volunteer or volunteers to read aloud: *1 Corinthians 12:12-27* (NLT). You might ask for a different volunteer to read it aloud a second time.

¹²The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

¹⁴Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? ¹⁸But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²²In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. ²³And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. ²⁷All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

UNPACKING GOD'S WORD

What does "the body of Christ" refer to in verse 12? How is the human body a good image for the body of Christ?

The Church is made up of baptized people from many different faith communities. How might this pose challenges for the body of Christ?

Describe a time when you felt like you didn't belong somewhere. What kinds of people might say they don't belong to the body of Christ because they are different in some way? (*If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body.*)

Describe someone in the body of Christ who has very different gifts than yours. What do you appreciate about them? (*If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?*)

In what ways might a congregation unintentionally (or, sadly, intentionally) discourage someone who doesn't "fit in"? How could a church be more intentionally welcoming of differences? (*The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."*)

What would you say are the "parts of the body [of Christ] that seem weakest and least important"? How are they "actually the most necessary"?

How does a congregation live out sharing suffering when one part suffers, or sharing gladness if one part is honored?

How many ways can you use this passage to complete this sentence: "Because God _____, therefore we _____." What do your responses mean for our community at Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church?"

CLOSING

Offer a closing prayer like this:

Lord God, you call together your people to be a community together, the body of Christ. We give you thanks for the differences among us that make us whole. Thank you for the gift of each person in this group and in our congregation. Teach us how to be a community that welcomes and celebrates every gift you bring among us in the form of our sisters and brothers in Christ. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.