

Lake Cities Community Church
Ecclesiology 101
June 8, 2008
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Unity in Diversity

The Church as the Body of Christ. 1 Cor. 12:12-24

Few things hurt Christianity as much as disunity. *Disunity hurts both the church's reputation before a watching world, and its ability to accomplish its mission.*

And unfortunately there are plenty of sermon illustrations about disunity in the Church. Let me give you one example. You remember in our first sermon in this series we learned that the church (*ekklesia*) exists in four dimensions – the local church, the regional church, the global church and the universal church. This illustration pertains to the global church - when it was literally split in half in 1054. You see, for the first 1,000 years of Christianity there was one church – no differing denominations, no other lines of division. But there was growing disagreement - There were differing opinions about potential crusades – holy wars. There were other theological and administrative conflicts. But the one issue which turned out to be the straw that broke the camel's back was a disagreement over the *Nicene Creed* – Was the Holy Spirit sent from the Father only (as it was written 600 years earlier) – or from the Father and the Son? The Western church wanted to add “and the son” and the Eastern church did not – they both dug in their heels. From our perspective this was a minor theological debate – but at the time it seemed important and it split the church.

Disunity hurts both the church's reputation before a watching world, and its ability to accomplish its mission. That is true at the global church level as well as the local church level. I

wonder -- what is your personal experience with disunity in a church? Do you know the pain of a church split? Have you heard the acid words of two believers going at it over some disagreement? Have you seen people dig in their heels over what at the time seemed really important but with perspective of time really wasn't. Have you seen brother and sisters in Christ part ways? If you have not – you are fortunate – I guess most of you have been in that situation.

There is nothing I pray for more than unity in our church – and nothing scares me more than disunity. I so desire LCCC to be a church characterized by unity in our leadership and unity in our congregation. That is why this metaphor we are looking at this morning is so very vital to us – the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is designed to communicate *one primary characteristic* of the church – and that is its **unity** in Christ.

Background

We are going to be in one passage this morning - please turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 – verses 12-26. As you turn there – let me give you a little background. The church at Corinth had one primary problem – can you guess what it was? Disunity. Paul said, *I exhort you, brethren...that there be no divisions among you...I have been informed that there are quarrels among you...each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul, " and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas" and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? There is jealousy and strife among you. - 1 Cor 1:10-13, 3:3.* There even was disunity in the practice of spiritual gifts – the context of chapter 12. So Paul pulled out a common metaphor – the body – and said, "Listen – the church is the body of Christ." Look as verse 12, chapter 12

Unity – The Goal (vv. 12-13)

“For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Just as the body has many parts so too the church has many members. We have at LCCC 20 families or individuals that call LCCC home – and with Annalise – I counted 71 individual lives - if we were all here at the same time. Though there are many members – the body is one – as Christ is one. Why? Look at verse 13.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” The 71 of us can be one body because *we all have something in common* –we have been baptized into one body – having all tasted the Holy Spirit. This is metaphor within metaphor – the language is simply saying – you are all Christians – the body has one head, Jesus.

In high school I was in the Scottsdale Youth Orchestra playing my trumpet. There was great diversity in the orchestra – percussion, strings, woodwinds, brass, but we all had something in common – we had the same conductor. And that conductor knew that each person played an important role in creating the music. So it is in the body of Christ – there is unity – because we have the same Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is true in the local, regional or global church. I met a brother in Christ from India a few weeks ago – I had never met him before. We come from different cultures, speak different

languages – yet we had an instant bond with one another – because of what we share in common – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unity – Hard to Maintain (14-17, 21)

The problem is that unity is really hard to maintain. At a meeting of the American Psychological Association, Jack Lipton, a psychologist at Union College, and R. Scott Bulione, a graduate student at Columbia University, presented their findings on how members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestras perceived each other. The percussionists were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard-of-hearing, yet fun-loving. String players were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and unathletic. The orchestra members overwhelmingly chose "loud" as the primary adjective to describe the brass players. Woodwind players seemed to be held in the highest esteem, described as quiet and meticulous, though a bit egotistical. Even with one conductor - with all that diversity of gifting and talent – unity is hard to maintain – so also in the church – look at verse 14-17:

1Cor. 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many. 1Cor. 12:15 If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. 1Cor. 12:16 And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. 1Cor. 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? In other words, sometimes we are not content with our role in the church – so we become jealous of others. And look at another problem in verse 21: And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” Sometimes people in the church become arrogant – especially those in the public eye – and they decide they really don’t need the other parts of the church – their values are all wrong.

It is hard to maintain unity in the church. And so the foot wants to be a hand, and the ear wants to be an eye. They want an upgrade. I mean, if you are the gall bladder of the body of Christ – you might not be all that happy with your assignment, and desire to be the stomach or at least the kidney. But if all the church were an ear - what a funny body that would be. Yet many of us desire to be something we are not – and it leads to frustration and disunity.

Can anyone here relate to this? Have you been there? Struggled with discontentment, or jealousy or maybe arrogance concerning your role in the church? It is hard to maintain unity in the church. Hard...But it is not impossible.

Unity – It is Possible!

Unity is possible for two reasons. Look at verses 18-20. [1Cor. 12:18](#) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. [1Cor. 12:19](#) If they were all one member, where would the body be? [1Cor. 12:20](#) But now there are many members, but one body. Unity is possible only if you realize that God is sovereign - He designed you and gifted you for an important place in the church. *It is His call where you serve.* God Himself has placed each one where He desires him or her to be. Do you believe that? Some are up front as teachers or evangelists - other are behind the scenes with the gifts of service and hospitality.

The harp is a beautiful instrument –but did you ever notice that in an orchestra you can rarely hear its beautiful notes. Trevor’s harp teacher told me a few weeks ago, “I have bloodied my fingers playing in the orchestra – only to realize that no one ever could hear me.” Do you ever feel like that? You are bloodying your fingers, but no one hears you play? Remember - God can hear you play – Whether you are cleaning the church building, or leading the youth, or working in the

nursery – no matter what it is – whether it is praised or not - be faithful and you will glorify God, you will have meaning and purpose in your life.

Unity is possible *if you believe God is sovereign* and second, unity is possible if we realize *we are interdependent* – We depend on one another. Look at verses 22-26

1 Cor 12:22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 1Cor. 12:23 and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 1Cor. 12:24 whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, 1Cor. 12:25 so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. 1Cor. 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

God's value system is radically different than our – God values each member of the church is equally important – is gift is needed. My role as the pastor is no more valuable than your role in the church – it is different, but I can't use my gifting if you don't use yours, and vice versa.

In learning to play the cello Taylor's teachers wants her to keep her left elbow up as it holds the cello – it should float. But the interesting thing – you can't change the elbow by itself – the position of the elbow is linked to the position of the left thumb on the cello's neck – if you want to change the elbow – you have to change the thumb – One is linked to the other – and so it is in the church. Every member is connected to the other.

There is great joy in our room today because of a little girl named Annalise – born healthy on Thursday. There would have been great sadness, though if something went wrong. Because we are connected, in Christ – dependent on one another.

When Paul talks about the church as the body of Christ – he is talking about unity – many members, but one body because there is one Christ. Is unity hard to maintain? Absolutely – we don't always like God's plan for us – and we want another role. Or we in our arrogance destroy unity. But if we recognize God is sovereign, and we see that we are all interdependent – we need one another – unity is possible. Well, what is our application?

Application

Here are some lessons for us this morning:

- 1) **For you to have purpose and fulfillment in this life – you must find and use your spiritual gifting to build up the body of Christ – the church.** That is a pretty big statement. But if you are a Christian – you were meant to fulfill a purpose in the church. Remember the metaphor of the building – you are a *lithos* – a living stone – crafted to fit a particular spot – Here you are gifted and designed by God to fit in the church – the Body of Christ.
- 2) **Be aware that we all, at times, contribute toward disunity** in the church. And I include myself in this point. Remember - there is a difference between uniformity and unity. If I try to get everyone to be an ear – uniformity – I have done damage to the body of Christ. Not everyone will value the things you value and that is OK. At times we fall into jealousy – why wasn't I asked to do such and such. How come she has that role? Or, I'm not going to do that job – it is beneath me. And so we maybe gossip a little

here and a little there, and make a comment about how you might do things differently.

Have you ever done that? Are you feeling that way now?

- 3) **Seek Unity in Diversity.** Finally – seek unity in diversity. Value the different gifts and people we have – each brings something special to our church. Unity occurs in diversity not apart from diversity. Many members – one body. How do we do that? By caring for one another, encourage those with different gifts than you – learn from them. Also be reminded this morning of our dependence on each other and with God’s help we can have unity in diversity.

Conclusion:

I don’t follow the comings and goings of the Pope’s very often. The current Pope, Benedict XVI seems to have a heart for unifying the global church. No I know there can be some danger there – but there is also (as we have seen) a biblical mandate for it.

November 30, 2006 he traveled to Constantinople. Why? The BCC reported: “He reached out to Orthodox Christians, seeking to heal a rift that has lasted more than 1,000 years by holding joint services and giving a joint blessing to their faithful by the side of Patriarch Bartholomew, their spiritual leader, on the holiest day in their church calendar, and then signed a joint declaration calling for “uniting our efforts to preserve Christian roots, traditions and values”. The Pope said, "The divisions which exist among Christians are a scandal to the world and an obstacle to the proclamation of the gospel." Amen to that – and may unity start here – with the 71 of us – together we are the body of Christ.