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Epiphany 3C Annual Meeting Sunday
Peace, Seattle
January 27, 2013
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

MANY MEMBERS, ONE BODY

It fell to me, this past week, to take Naomi to her doctor for her 5-year-old well child visit at the clinic.

She was measured and weighed, of course; her eyes were checked, her heart and lungs listened to; her blood pressure taken. Everything—including her hearing, surprisingly enough—was in fine working order. She's right on schedule; right where she should be for her age—including the yearning for independence and the willingness to test boundaries.

These annual checkups have become occasions for seeing her growth in other ways as well.
- Like the deeper curiosity she had about what the visit was for;
- Her pride in showing off her ability to jump high and walk on heels and tip toes;
- The confident way carried herself through the whole appointment.

Everything's working just as it should in Naomi, the individual parts of her body are working together as designed, as a system, interdependently, seamlessly, marvelously.

Those of us who have a few years on Naomi know that it will not always be so. We know that our bodies—ourselves—are not designed to last forever; that systems will eventually break down, and incidents from the past will return to haunt us. We all come into this world with an expiration date.

As if we needed more evidence of that, we lost two more seniors last week. At 90+, both Betty's and Gladys' bodies finally said, "Enough."

That such a time will come for all of us is a reality we know very well, even if we try our best to keep it at bay. For now, by the grace of God, we are here. And the question is, how then will we live? How will we relate to the other individuals, the other bodies, who inhabit our world? How will we carry ourselves?

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, has an answer. God intends that we live in community, relating to each other in the same way the parts of our bodies work together as a single whole.

> 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.

Writing to a culture of brash individualists intent on doing their own thing, Paul spins out this incredible metaphor to say, "our being and our conduct in the world is NOT the story of separate, autonomous individuals making separate, autonomous decisions apart from outside influences. NO! We are yoked to one another! Though varied and diverse we—like the parts of the human body—are designed to be in relationship to one another—to function as one integrated, interdependent system: the body of Christ."

IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER; IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL REJOICE.

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It's telling, I think, that in the chapter immediately preceding this one, Paul tells the Corinthian congregation in no uncertain terms that when it comes to how they share the central meal of their new found faith, the Lord's Supper, they are completely missing the boat.

> WHEN YOU COME TOGETHER, IT IS NOT REALLY TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER. FOR WHEN THE TIME COMES TO EAT, EACH OF YOU GOES AHEAD WITH OR OWN SUPPER, AND ONE GOES HUNGRY AND ANOTHER BECOMES DRUNK. WHAT! DO YOU NOT HAVE HOMES TO EAT AND DRINK IN? OR DO YOU SHOW CONTEMPT FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD AND HUMILIATE THOSE WHO HAVE NOTHING?
>
> THOSE WHO EAT THE BREAD OR DRINK THE CUP WITHOUT DISCERNING THE BODY, EAT AND DRINK JUDGMENT AGAINST THEMSELVES.

His point is crystal clear: when we come to the Table we're to notice how God has called us in Christ to <u>be in relationship</u> with one another; we're to notice that <u>we are members of one body</u>, <u>not</u> because it is our will to be so, but because God in Christ has made it so.

We take in his body and blood to become what we ingest—<u>his body in the world.</u>

After service today, after we share at this table, we'll go downstairs to share around other tables… both food and fellowship, yes; <u>and</u> we'll also be fashioning a strategy for how we intend to conduct ourselves as the body of Christ in this place during the coming year.

- How we will bring good news, proclaim release and recovery,
- how we will act in ways that set free those who are bound.

Because this body we call Peace is diverse, there will be a variety of opinions expressed!

And because Christ is the <u>head</u> of this body, we will never be able to say to one another YOU ARE NOT PART OF THE BODY; YOU DON'T BELONG HERE; or YOUR OPINION IS NOT WELCOME.

Bodies are amazing creations. And so are communities of faith. And God is the author of them both.

Let us pray:

Creator of all, thank you for the gift of our bodies, and for the ways they enable us to experience the world and enter into relationship with one another. And thank you for Peace congregation—the body of Christ in this place. May our senses be tuned to your message, and our wills be shaped by your Spirit, that through our decisions this day, we might continually incarnate your presence and your hope in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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