

1 Corinthians 12:12-27  
Pastor Paul Horn

There is no 'I' in Church!

- I. The anatomy of a losing team
- II. The anatomy of a winning team

*12The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

*14Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

"Do you believe in miracles?" was the question TV broadcaster Al Michaels shouted when the 1980 US Olympic hockey team defeated their archrival and heavily favored Soviet Union opponent. Just a week before the games started that year, the US had been soundly defeated by the Soviet team 10-3 in an ugly exhibition in Madison Square Garden. In their matches leading up to the fabled showdown with the Soviets, the US team narrowly escaped defeat in almost every case. Now they had to play a clearly superior team, a team that had global respect as one of the best teams ever. The day before the match, columnist Dave Anderson wrote in the New York Times, "Unless the

ice melts, or unless the United States team or another team performs a miracle, the Russians are expected to easily win the Olympic gold medal for the sixth time in the last seven tournaments.”

So what happened? How could this ragtag group of collegiate players and pro hopefuls defeat the Soviets? How could they pull off “the greatest moment in sports in the 20th century” as voted by Sports Illustrated magazine? Many have debated the answer to that. Some suggest great coaching, others a good game plan, and still others an inspirational team captain. But all agree on one thing—teamwork! Every member of that team realized what it meant to be on a team. Each one subscribed to the old sports adage, “There is no ‘I’ in team.” When they did that, a “miracle” happened.

In our text Paul describes a miracle of sorts as well. He describes a team, a collection of very different individuals, who must work together in difficult circumstances. This team has a great coach, an inspirational team captain, and a fool proof game plan. The team Paul is talking about is the Church, the divine collection of all believers; those in Corinth and those right here at Faith Lutheran. Over the next few minutes we will hear a pep talk that will remind each team member that “there is no ‘I’ in Church.”

To reinforce this concept of “team,” Paul uses the body as an illustration, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1Cor 12:12-14,27) Paul begins by talking about the anatomy of an unhealthy body or losing team where one team member, the foot, says “Since I’m not a hand, I’m not worthy to be part of this body.” And another team member, the ear, says “I’m not an eye so I don’t belong either.” Here are team members looking around at what they do and what others do and determining they aren’t good enough. They provide no value. Like the kid who sits on the bench in the dugout, bats once or twice during the game and you can count on him striking out.

So how could it come to that: members of the body not feeling they belong? Didn’t other members of the body encourage them? Didn’t they talk to them about how much they were valued team members? It’s really not that hard to believe. Sinners like you and me do not naturally think of others. We know when we are feeling down or hurting, but often miss when others are feeling the same way. It is far easier for us to criticize or gossip than to encourage and speak well of. Our sinful selves are experts at watching out for number one, me. Is it any wonder others, even others on the same team, feel like outsiders . . . like they don’t belong? We truly have become very accomplished at putting the “I” in church.

The next scenario is even worse. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (vs17) Paul describes a monstrosity! Can you imagine? A big eye or a big ear? Useless, right? In the same way the church is not about superstars. It’s not about the pastor, the lifelong member, the highest contributor, the most volunteer hours. While all play a part, none is greater than the other.

And finally, Paul finishes off this rather negative look at an unhealthy body with an utterly narcissistic picture, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’” (vs21) Narcissus was a mythical character who, after becoming thirsty, went to drink from a stream. As he saw his reflection, he fell in love with it, not knowing that it was him. As he bent down to kiss it, the reflection seemed to “run away” and he was heartbroken. He grew thirstier but he wouldn't touch the water for fear of damaging his reflection, so he eventually died of thirst and self love, staring at his own reflection.

When members are self-centered, the whole body suffers. An unhealthy body, Paul says, has members that are self-absorbed, who feel they can “go it alone.” Before we point the finger and say, “Oh, that's them,” or we say, “That's not me,” by nature, that is every one of us. At times we don't feel that we need each other. And worse . . . we feel that we don't need God. And that fatal flaw, forged by original sin and cemented by our own sins each day, has put us at odds with an almighty God who demands death for those sins.

With a clear picture of an unhealthy body, Paul goes on to focus on a healthy body and its source of strength. God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (vs22-26) What a beautiful picture of the Church, the body of Christ: no divisions, equal concern for each other, compassion for suffering, shared honor, every part rejoicing. This sounds too good to be true. How is this possible? Because of the head, Jesus Christ.

While it is true that Jesus is our inspirational team captain, he is much more than that. He is our substitute. He is the reason the Church has any members at all. By God's grace, Jesus became one of us. He lived a life that none of us could ever live, a perfect one. He died a death that none of us could ever die, a death that paid for the sins of the world, for my sins of thinking I can go it alone, of failing to encourage the body, of being self-centered, Christ paid for those sins. He then rose from a grave from which none of us could ever escape, a grave that could not hold the Son of God, a grave that, because of its emptiness, is a picture of your grave and mine. That's the story of your victory against all odds; a victory won by Christ for you.

If Christ has done all this for us, why are there still divisions in the church? Because our self-centered sinful nature still lingers around. What must a church do to avoid these divisions? Continue to gather around the Means of Grace: that is, the tools God uses to strengthen us with his love. The Means of Grace are the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. When we, the members of the body continue to look at how we are united, self-absorbed attitudes flee, the ‘I’ in church is deleted, and we walk together; members who have been united into one body through a very special means. As Paul says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” (vs13) Baptized in the name of our Triune God, you have been crucified and died with Christ, your sins are washed away, you have been given new life and rebirth, you have been saved from Satan, death and hell. We all have a strong common bond. When we remember that we are all brothers and sisters who

have been baptized and forgiven, we will avoid these petty arguments and nitpicking, instead we will love each other, forgive one another and encourage.

With Christ at the head of this team, this body is called to do the work Christ outlined. A hockey team would call that the “game plan.” The church would call it God’s Word. God’s Word contains all the directives we need. And the beauty of it all is that God has put together this team to carry out that plan. It is a team effort. “God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” The church is more than a loose collection of individuals united by geography and a membership. The church is more than the collection of 151 members of this church. It’s more than the almost 400,000 WELS members across the globe. The church is not just an institution. The church is a living organism with life breathed into it by its head Jesus Christ. Through the miracle of baptism, we are teammates. We are members of the same body, all with gifts to use in his service.

“But I don’t have any gifts to contribute to the body,” you say. That’s nonsense. The Holy Spirit tells us in his Word that he has blessed all Christians with spiritual gifts. Discover what your gifts are. Ask your pastor or fellow members of this body to help you discover your unique gifts. Once you think you’ve identified a gift in a certain area of ministry, try it out for a while. Take the initiative and ask, “Where can I serve?” And after you’ve tried an area of ministry and you find it doesn’t suit you, try another one! Put your gifts to work for the Lord, and, as you the eye, work with the ear and nose and hands, the body works together and God is glorified.

While you walk together as Christ’s body, remember that although each of you have your unique and individual gifts, you all have the same mission as the body of Christ. You just sang the hymn, “I want to walk as a child of the light.” That’s your mission, to walk as a child of the light. The Light is Christ. Your purpose in life is to reflect the light of Christ in this dark and sinful world, by the way you act and speak to each other and to folks you don’t know, to employers, employees and neighbors. You shine like lights when you share the good news of Jesus with those people. And that, my dear friends, is when miracles happen.

God wants miracles far greater than any hockey team could accomplish. Each soul that once was lost and now is found is a miracle. God has chosen you, the person sitting next to you, our church, and other churches across our Wisconsin Synod to “walk together” as light, as team members, as baptized, forgiven sinners with a wonderful story of victory against all odds. Do you believe in miracles? Al Michael’s answer in 1980 and ours in 2009 are the same . . . YES! Amen.