

Sermon 1613

Romans 12.1-8

September 17, 2017

Everybody in construction, from the architect to the plan checkers, from the general contractor and the foreman to the tile layers, knows how interconnected everything in the building is. It all has to fit and it is all important. Got a six inch duct for the HVAC? But there's only 5 inches of clearance! No problem, raise the second floor two inches for good measure. Then the support beams will be 2 inches too short! "Hey, isn't there supposed to be a fire sprinkler system in this building? You are going to need another water line."

If everyone were geniuses, there would be no change orders and the buildings would come in under budget. On earth, dealing with human beings all around, we are just happy when a construction project gets done at all.

How different it is when God put together his holy, Christian Church!

Jesus Put Us Here for Each Other.

1. God's will (1-2).
2. Christ's body (3-5).
3. The Spirit's gifts (6-8).

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (1-2)."

"Therefore." Paul covers a lot of ground with that one word. He has spent the previous eleven chapters of Romans talking about Law and Gospel, man's fall from grace, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and God's undeserved love. "Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." We are victorious in Christ. "Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Our whole Christian life is a response to God's love for us. "In view of God's mercy." We don't live in order to earn heaven. We live because we have been given heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. It is God's will that we are here for each other. We are not here for ourselves or here for the world. Paul specifically says that—"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." Any Greenspun student or alumni knows and hates those Canadian geese. They pasture on the athletic field and muck it up. One day I was driving to church and looked over at the geese prepping the fields for the flag football teams, and there was a white duck in the middle of all the geese. I thought to myself, "He's not fooling anyone." A Christian who tries to fit in with wicked friends, who tries to go along with the unbelieving world is not going to fool anyone. We will be singled out like a fly in the soup. Like the servant girl asked Peter in the courtyard when Jesus was on trial, "Weren't you with him?" the wise guys will say, "Aren't you a Christian?" So don't even try. It will only damage you, like hammering a round peg into a square hole

until enough of the peg is destroyed so it is forced in. Instead, be transformed. By living for God (that's what using your body as a living sacrifice means), we will find out what God's will is. I wasn't put here for myself. I was put here for others. I will find my purpose in life and find joy in using the gifts that have been given me as I serve others. As I go along in my life that part of God's plan becomes clearer and I find great joy in it. Ask any of our mothers. As any of our teens who have served as team captain.

Jesus put us here for each other. We are Christ's body.

Don't get the big head. Don't think you are the only one that matters and the world exists to serve you. That's always the weakness of any survey of church members, "What do you want your church to be?" A lot of the responses are what I want the church to do to serve me. We are here to serve each other as Christ's body.

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (4-5)."

Let's go back to our original idea of a building. Let's say we had a grand and glorious vision when we built this church. We wanted two balconies on three sides of this church, with forty-five feet high ceilings and statues of all the apostles along the first floor walls with a two story statue of the ascending Jesus, his blue and white robe trimmed with real 24 karat gold leaf above an Italian marble altar. What a sight!

Well, something like that is going to take a lot of money. We only have so much. Do away with the air conditioning and heating. Get rid of the fellowship hall, but build a kitchen facing outwards towards a covered patio. Those things aren't all that important when it comes to that grand and glorious worship area. And as for Sunday School classes, well, they can just meet on the pews in different corners of the church.

What kind of maniac would come up with a plan like that? Why not save even more and not put a roof on the building? Do you really need indoor plumbing? Come on! Everybody knows all those parts of a church are important. They all fit together for a higher purpose, to proclaim the love of God to people and, through that instruction, to help them grow in their faith as the Holy Spirit blesses.

We are here for each other. We can't get along without each other. Who is going to preach the sermon if you don't need the pastors? Think the Altar Guild is unimportant? Just wait until the pastor takes the lid off the cups of wine and finds the tray empty! I just serve in the nursery? Let's let the toddlers by themselves and see what damage they will do! A few of them might come out alive. The attendance and participation of everyone is important. You encourage the person next to you as you sing and pray with them. You help change a life as you teach a Bible class

and by the questions you ask and answer as a participant in those Bible classes. Not a single part of a well-designed building is superfluous or stands out so much that it is mismatched. Not a single member of Christ's body is unnecessary or unnoticed. It is God's plan that we belong to each other. We belong to Christ's body, the Church. That means we belong to each other.

Jesus put us here for each other with the Spirit's gifts.

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (6-8).”

A former member of ours, he lives back in Minnesota now, had a heart transplant. I was amazed to find out that they don't reconnect the heart to the nervous system, only to the veins and arteries. The heart beats at its own rate, 100 beats per minute. In fact, when people have open heart surgery, one of the difficulties surgeons have is to get the heart to stop beating so they can work on it. The heart just doesn't want to stop beating. That's what God designed it for and that is what it will do.

The Holy Spirit designed each of us for service in the holy Christian Church. We know that because he has given us our individual gifts. Some of us may love children and love being around them. Sunday School! Preschool! Pioneers! Nursery staffing! We've got lots of opportunities. Dealing with children may be as appealing to some of us as getting our heads stuck in a pickle jar. We like things orderly. Numbers! Hey, how about a money counter? We could use about two teams who are accurate to serve about once a month. Others have green thumbs. Why not be our landscape engineer and keep an eye on and supplement the efforts of the paid lawn crew? Fixer-upper? We have two trustees but they could use a lot of help. Bright, but have trouble listening to sermons? I honestly think that's why God made me a pastor! It's the only way he'd make me think about what the sermons say!

Paul's words to the Romans clearly bring this out. Everybody has different gifts and they put these gifts to work. If they don't... Well, what would happen to the body if the eye decided it was too good to watch out for the rest of the body? What would happen to the heart if it decided it was not going to beat any more for the body? Not using our spiritual gifts not only harms the body, but it harms the person who is not using what God has obviously given them to use. So use them. Unless things are going terribly, terribly wrong, the local congregation should be facing the challenge of having too many people wanting to serve rather than not having enough people to fill the positions that they obviously need for the daily, modest programs that the membership has decided the church should offer.

I don't like to do this, to preach about an institution, but I have to bring this up. Currently we are looking for almost an entirely new church council. Our president's term is up, one of our trustees has served the maximum three years and we have functioned for an entire year without any elders. Are the plans of our church so extravagant that we are not matching reality with our manpower? I don't think it is unusual for a congregation to have elders looking out for the spiritual welfare of the people. Unless it is a Roman Catholic Church, where the bishop calls the shots and the parish priest hops to it, members of a Lutheran church tend to expect that there will be a president leading the congregation. Seeing to it that members are visited, prospects are nurtured, classes and services held, keeping the property in repair, planning congregational work days, keeping an orderly and transparent accounting of the money, those are not extravagant goals. We all would say, "Yes, this congregation should do all of these things."

So my question to you is, is this congregation that sick that we don't have people to fill these positions or are people resisting the Holy Spirit who gave them these gifts, because they don't want to go to the bother of serving their brothers and sisters in the local congregation?

I guess we'll find out the answer when the annual voters' meeting comes around on January 28 and we have elections for these positions.

But look at how we use these spiritual gifts. Paul doesn't say something like, "as you should," "because nobody else will do it" or "because you must." If you serve, serve. If you teach, teach. If you encourage, encourage. Give generously, lead diligently, help cheerfully. You just do it, because that's what you were designed to do. This is what God created you and me to do. In view of God's mercies, thinking about all the love and sacrifice Jesus has poured into you and me, his long years spent on a hard life here on earth, the many times he was ridiculed and rejected, his twisted trial and unlawful condemnation, his sufferings and death on the cross, in view of God's mercy to you and me, do this, God is telling us. And the Spirit who put faith in our heart responds. God's promise of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation meet a "Yes, I believe and trust in that with all my heart and I am so looking forward to it." So his command to serve, teach, encourage, give, show mercy also receive a "Sure, I can do that and I will be happy to do it. I won't let my sinful nature get in the way, because I want to live for you." We don't have to join a monastery to serve God. We don't have to sit on a mountain in solitude to be pleasing to God. Luther in his Reformation emphasized the vocation of a Christian. Right where we are, right where we live, we can and do serve God by serving one another. Jesus put us here for each other. It shows by the Spirit's gifts.

You may have noticed I left out one gift. Prophecy. We have taken that as meaning preaching, not predicting the future. Abraham prophesied in worship. David prophesied. They were speaking the Word of God, teaching it to their generation. So you have preachers who get up into this pulpit and speak the Word

of God to you, explaining what it says and applying it to our daily lives. We are to use it in agreement with the faith. Whatever is said here is in line with everything else God teaches us in the Bible. If I get the crazy idea that Jesus was born in Egypt, the Christmas accounts of Matthew and Luke, not to mention the prophecy of Micah, will bring me in line with the truth. This is part of what we mean by Scripture alone. Our faith is based only on the Bible, for the Bible does not contain errors. It does not contradict itself. It is faithful and true. If it weren't, it wouldn't be the Holy Bible. If our preaching did not line up with it completely, it really wouldn't be preaching, because it wouldn't be serving for your comfort and the strengthening of your faith. You see from front to back, from old to young, from top to bottom,

Jesus Put Us Here for Each Other.

1. God's will (1-2)
2. Christ's body (3-5)
3. The Spirit's gifts (6-8).

And what a wonderful building this one, holy Christian Church is! Only the all-knowing Father, the almighty Son and the ever-present Spirit could have planned and put it together!