Sermon on the Body of Christ

<u>What is the body of Christ?</u>

- ***Origin* – Hebrews 10:5**… "**a body You have prepared for me**"

    - **Ephesians 1:3-7** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ… having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ… In Him we have redemption"
    - **1 Peter 1:20**… God "foreordained" the body of Christ "before the foundation of the world"…
    - The body did not have an animate existence until the Holy Spirit came and gave it life. His coming is promised by Christ in **Luke 24:49** and is fulfilled in **Acts 2:2-4**.
    - The Spirit breathed life into the body of Christ… or as Larry Boyd so aptly put it the other day, He is the divine DNA marker that is present in those who are in the body of Christ
    - He brings life to those in Christ, just the way He brought life to Christ in Mary's womb as told in **Luke 1:35**…
    - After Christ ascended into heaven to take His throne, He sent the Holy Spirit to earth in order to establish the church on the day of Pentecost 50 days after Christ's crucifixion
        - The Holy Spirit gave Peter the words to say in **Acts 2** in order to use the keys to the kingdom that he had been promised by Christ in **Matthew 16:19**…
        - Peter, on that day, spoke as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance in order to open the doors to the church for the salvation of mankind.

- ***Makeup* – Acts 2:47**..."**the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved**"

    - **Colossians 1:18**… Paul tells us that Christ "is the head of the body, the church…" so we know that the body of Christ is also equivalent to the church of Christ…
    - This is important to know because we are not just a group of people who meet together… we have a higher calling… a divine function
    - The church is made up of those being saved and in **1 Corinthians 12:24** we see that God composes the makeup of the body when adding those to it who have obeyed the Gospel…
    - God puts everyone into the Body with a role He has planned for them… let's read **1 Corinthians 12:27** & **28**
    - When you obey the Gospel, you obey the command to be baptized as expressed in **Acts 2:38**… at that moment four things happen spiritually all at once:
        - Your sins are washed away (**Acts 22:16**)
        - you are put into Christ (**Romans 6:3**)

        - you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**)
        - and you become member of his body the church (**Acts 2:47**)
    - "**Members**"…or "parts" of the body are made up of individual people in the church (**1 Corinthians 12:18**)… and God sets us in the body where He sees fit
    - Therefore with all of this we see that the Godhead is completely represented in the body which is the church:
        - God the Father composing the body
        - Christ as the head directing the body
        - The Holy Spirit giving life to the body by His presence indwelling us
    - There is a universal body which includes all of those on the earth who are being saved, and there is a local body which represents Christ through the presence of the local church
    - Each local body is an independent representation of Christ to the local populous… there is no earthly hierarchy because Christ is the only head and He is reigning over His kingdom and its citizenry, the church, from heaven

<u>What is the body's purpose?</u>

- ***Direction* – Colossians 2:19**… "… **holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God**"

    - The body gets all of its direction from Christ… "**the Head**" from whom our life and actions should flow
    - We are told what to do in scripture… Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 2:16** that "**we have the mind of Christ**"… so we can know how Christ would have us to act
    - That is essentially what the scriptures are… the expression of God's mind to us laid out in a fashion that we can comprehend and then act upon… knowing what His will is

- ***Functions* – Matthew 28:19ff**… "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you…**"

    - Just as Christ needed a physical body to live in, in order to come into the world and accomplish His mission for the Father, even now Christ and the Holy Spirit needs a body to live in, in order to accomplish their cooperative work for the salvation of the world
    - For Christ, the body or the church is His corporeal representation upon the earth… His remaining physical example to the world
    - We are the hands, feet, arms, eyes, ears and mind of Christ evident on this earth
    - Our function or "mission" was just stated a few moments ago when we read **Matthew 28**…
        - We are those who actively perform the work needed for producing salvation…

        - Just as the farmer's arms, hands, legs and feet till the soil, sow the seed, and water the crops…
        - so we are the ones who do "the going, the baptizing, and the teaching"… as directed by the Head of the body
        - Jesus does this through the scriptures… the inspired message brought to us by the Holy Spirit when He came at Pentecost some 2,000 years ago
    - It is incumbent upon us to spread the gospel message and to teach the world with every aspect of our lives… that is our purpose!
    - One other thing, as the body or the church, we are also the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**)… God dwells with men through us as the church resident upon the earth
    - **Acts 2:38** and **Romans 8:11** also tell us that God actively indwells mankind through the agency of the Holy Spirit when people obey the gospel message …
    - Again the whole Godhead is seen as active in the purpose…
        - God composed the plan for the Body
        - Christ has His physical existence here in the body, the church
        - And so does the Holy Spirit

<u>Identification</u>

- ***Characteristics and Behavior* – John 13:35**… "**By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another**"

    - We are known by others and identified by our behavior… by the love that we show
    - **1 John 4:8** tells us that "**God is love**"… if God is resident in us and dwells here with men through us… then that love should be evident in all that we do
    - God showed His love to the world by the giving of His Son to die for us
    - God actively shows His love to the world today through His daily providence, but He also does it through us… think about that.
    - **1 Corinthians 13** is one of the best known chapters of the Bible… when I read it and I measure myself against it… when I see what love really is… I see how woefully short of the ideal I really am in everyday life
    - Do we love and trust **<u>one another</u>** as much as we should?
    - We are supposed to love everyone… even our enemies as the Lord has told us… but do we even love each other enough?
    - I recently read an article from a minister for one of the churches in Tennessee and he wrote the following which I paraphrased a bit:

        - "So often I stand in front of a group of Christians and I wonder how many of them are hurting. It's so strange the way so many of us like to pretend that nothing is wrong even during rough times. I don't know why we do it. Even worse, when we are around our church family, we pretend things are great. Our church family are the people we truly care about. This is the group that we are open with, this should be the group that helps us through tough times, and should be the group we regularly help out when in need.

But, instead we put on our "church face" and hide our real struggles. **James 5:13-18** is a passage that talks about prayer and praying for others. We need to pray when we have struggles, and we need to pray for others when they have struggles. But if we hold everything in how can we pray for each other? It seems very important to be the kind of people that when told about struggles, we will not go out gossiping about it or treating that individual like a heathen. We have to make ourselves into a people who can love and pray for each other. This issue really two sided, we need to open up with each other and act like the family we are and we need to be more loving and understanding. Now I know I said understanding, but not accepting of sin. I hope we can love and encourage one another more and more every day.

- Does Pride get in our way with this? Pride refuses to admit the need for God… or for His people… it refuses to admit it cannot meet its own needs
- One of the reasons God gave us the church is precisely **<u>because we cannot meet our own needs</u>**
- **Galatians 6:2** tells us to "**Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ**"… how can I help you bear your burdens if I don't even know what they are?
- You know Jim did a fine job this morning talking about this subject I want to bring up… Look at our numbers here tonight… how many are missing from this morning? If we love each other we will want to be around each other
- Frankly the church is a snapshot of heaven upon the earth… Christ and the Holy Spirit are here with us… if we don't love being with one another here then by extension we won't love being with one another in heaven… and we all know that is an impossibility… God will not allow that
- Brothers and sisters…
  - **We are not just superficial acquaintances**…
  - **We are not "just friends"**…
  - **We are much more than that**… **we are brethren**…
  - **We are the family of God!**
- The blood that flows over us is the blood of Christ… and His Spirit is in us… those things are supposed to be thicker for us than any earthly tie or pursuit!!
- One question to pose here is this…if we do not love one another enough to be the people God intends for us to be, **how can we love the lost enough to want to save them**? If we don't love those who we are supposed to love easily, **how can we love those who are even less easy to love**? The answer is "we cannot"
- Think about this statistic… last year this congregation had 11 baptisms… the year before we had 12, and the year before that the same… that fact makes the question I just asked that much more meaningful
- **1 Corinthians 12** is filled with so many passages about the body of Christ, its characteristics and its behavior
  - **v. 12** tells us that we are one body with many members
  - **v. 13** tells us that by one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, we are baptized into that one body
  - **v. 22** tells us that all of us are necessary even the weaker members

        - **v. 25** tells us that there should be no schism in the body… no divisions… no splits… no cliques
        - **Verses 15-21** tells us that no part of the body that God composes can be without the other parts… they all serve a purpose
        - We cannot segregate ourselves from one another and function correctly as the body of Christ!
        - I look at faces in the congregation and I see people whose names I don't know a times… how many of us even try to correct that? I know I don't often enough.
        - We need to make sure that we are crossing the aisles between the pews and that we are loving and encouraging everyone… not just those who are "like" us as individuals…
            - Age should not matter…
            - Socio-economic status should not matter…
            - Physical looks or mode of dress should not matter…
            - There should be no demographic we group once another by and stick to
            - Either we are all one… or we are not God's children… it is that simple.
            - We need to treat each other as such…

- ***Why a body?* – Genesis 1:31**... "**Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.**"

    - I believe in my opinion, that God chose the analogy of a body to describe us because the creation of mankind physically and spiritually was the crowning achievement of Creation
    - Our bodies are a work of the most intricate art imaginable… made by the Master Creator
    - Every system and member of the body supports the others all the way down to the smallest appendages and cells
    - Interestingly there are parallels between the functions of the parts of the body and the functioning of the body of Christ
        - Just as blood flows through our veins and into every recess in our bodies bringing us oxygen and cleansing the toxins from us at the cellular level
        - So the blood of Christ flows over us and keeps us free from even the smallest hint of sin's stains… in that sense we are all blood brothers and sisters in Christ
        - As our brains controls our body's actions… so the Head of the body, Christ Jesus, should control our actions
    - I look around the auditorium and I see your faces…
        - I see a **strong back** for walking uprightly in our eldership
        - I see among your faces the **lips** that speak the gospel and needed kindnesses
        - I see **shoulders and strong legs** that bear burdens and do hard work
        - I see **arms** that help and hug

- I see **feet** that carry the gospel to others
- I see **hands** that heal and bind up wounds
- I see **eyes** that are watchful and full of love and hope
- I see **ears** that readily listen to others burdens and that hear the word of God when spoken
- You know I saw a lovely scene this morning… Suzanne Gillson and Hannah were sitting with Nancy Palmer… and I thought to myself… "yep that is how we are supposed to look… that's how the church is supposed to be"
- Let's read **1 Corinthians 12:26**… I see faces out there in all the congregation that fulfill the words written in that passage
- I look around and see a body with many different parts and functions but with one purpose… that is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and contribute to His kingdom's expansion
- I look around here and I see faces that I love very much…
- I just want to see us "***love***" more… So that we can be all that the Lord wants us to be as His ambassadors to His creation

Where is the body going?

- ***Destination*** **-** Let's read **Ephesians 1:4 and 5** once again
    - Clearly there is a New Testament concept of "***predestination***" and it exists "i**n Christ**", though this gets twisted up and perverted in Calvinistic teachings of the denominational churches
    - Simply put the body of Christ is the vehicle God chose before the foundation of the world for the salvation of mankind… just as those who were in the ark were saved from the destruction of the great flood in **Genesis 7**… just as those in the ark were saved from the water so will those in the body of Christ be saved from the fires of Hell on the last day
    - Brethren… the destination of the body is heaven and it will be there for all eternity after the last day

- ***And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!"***… **Revelation 22:17**
    - The Holy Spirit through the Word of God tells those want salvation to come and obey the Gospel… to put on Christ in baptism and have their sins washed away in His blood as Christ commanded
    - The church… the bride of Christ…says come… through her delivering of her Master's message to the world… and through her actions that show His love
    - They both say come… if you need to answer the call please do so now