**November 21, 2021 Christ the King/Commitment Sunday**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**First Corinthians 12:12-27**

**The Need to Stretch**

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Creaky. In my younger years it was an adjective that spoke of door hinges in need of oiling and furniture that was well past its prime. When I entered my fifties creaky became a word that I associate with my back in the morning.

When I wake up in the morning, more mornings than not, it feels like someone has taken a tight grip on the muscles of my lower back. Every day I gingerly make my way out of bed and with a few stiff steps, head for my yoga mat. After about a half hour of various stretches my back loosens up and I am ready to push my body hard through a workout. My body becomes limber and my strides confident. I am ready to face the day. The interesting lesson I needed to learn about my back was that the key to loosening it up was not so much stretching my back but stretching my legs and the rest of my body. When my legs and the rest of my body are stretched out it allows my back to loosen up.

The human body is a remarkably interdependent, complex and coordinated creation. It is also a wonderful choice of metaphor by Paul. But he was not the first to use the metaphor of the body to discuss the dynamics of community. It was a common metaphor of the Romans as well. The interesting thing is how they chose to use the metaphor. The Romans used it to suggest that there was a hierarchy which needed to be honored. They suggested that those of lesser status were created to serve those of higher status because certain body parts were created to serve other body parts.

Paul, of course, turns this use of the metaphor on its head, demonstrating that the interdependence of the body demonstrates how all of us are essential and valuable to the whole. It is important that we remember the context in which Paul wrote these words to the church in Corinth. Paul had a complicated relationship with the Corinthians with its share of ups and downs. And the Corinthians had a history of division within their community, of conflict between the haves and the have nots. Those divisions and conflicts made the church of Corinth a creaky and stiff community at times.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus teaches us “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” When we gather together God is present and we are indeed the body of Christ. This means that we deeply and inherently need each other to be faithful. Christianity is not a solitary pursuit. The Bible repeatedly teaches us that it is only together that we can faithfully journey with our God.

A person went to meet with their minister once, announcing they had something to confess. With awkward embarrassment they announced that on some Sundays they could not join in the Affirmation of Faith because their heart was filled with doubt. The minister responded, “On those Sundays when you have trouble believing lean upon the person in the pew next to you and their faith. They can affirm your faith for you. And the week when they are filled with doubt it will be your turn to affirm their faith for them.” A lifetime of faithfulness cannot be journeyed on our own. We need to lean on each other. We need to learn from each other. We need to share the joys and burdens of our lives.

Each of us receives the remarkable gifts of sharing in being the Body of Christ. And each of us bears the responsibility of being the body of Christ. Our relationship with the church is not one of being consumers of a service but participants in a community. And just like any body, if all of its members are not functioning, the body will break down.

One of the bumper stickers you will sometimes see on the back of a car and attribute to Ghandhi is, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” The corollary for us is “Be the church you want.” Want a church that is mission-minded? Are you ready to serve others in the community? Want a church that is friendly? Are you ready to serve as a greeter on a Sunday morning? Want a church that has the resources it needs to thrive? Are you ready to be a generous giver? Want a church that is, fill in the blank here? What are you willing to do to make it happen?

Today is the day we dedicate our stewardship pledges.

Today we make a commitment of ourselves and our resources for the next year. As you know our theme for this year’s campaign has been together we serve. For the body of Christ to thrive every member of the body must play its part. We do that by sharing our talents and our treasure. This year we are challenging the congregation for one hundred percent participation in our pledge drive. The amount each of us is capable of pledging will vary but all of us are capable of pledging; of making a financial promise to do our best to support the life and ministry of this Body of Christ; of ensuring we have the resources we need to continue to grow into whom God is calling us to be together.

Every church is a little like my back. If every member of the body of Christ does not stretch itself, a church can become creaky; it can lose the ability to move freely; to step confidently into the future. Now, undeniably, some of those stretches I do every morning take some effort to push through the stiffness. But I do them because I know where they will lead. They will lead to a day in which my body will be limber and energetic and ready to respond to all that comes before it.

The same is true for this congregation, this body of Christ. The effort of us stretching ourselves together will be well worth it because, with God’s help, we will be a family of faith that can enter into the days ahead being limber, and energetic, and ready to respond to all that awaits us.

Each and every one of us has our role to play in this. Each of us is called to committing ourselves and our resources that God’s Holy Spirit may work through us. We need each other as much as my back needs my legs to be stretched out so that it can do what it is supposed to do. Where would the sopranos in the choir be without the altos, tenors, and basses? How would we gather for worship without our greeters and ushers to welcome us into this place? How would we hear anyone in worship or watch worship from home via livestream without our AV techs up in the balcony? Perhaps this reality is never more true than on this Sunday when we elect servant leaders to faithfully guide us into our future together.

No role is less important than any other. Everybody has a role to play. And it is God’s Holy Spirit that weaves together what we bring. What each of us brings may not appear all that remarkable on the surface but in God’s creative hands beauty is born. It is only with each of us and all of us stretching together that we can be the limber Body of Christ we are being called to be.

Thanks be to God. Amen.