

Sermon: *We Who Are Many Are One Body In Christ*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall (first Sunday back from Sabbatical)
All Angels 8.23.26

Exodus 1:8-2:10
Psalm 124
Romans 12:1-8
Matthew 16:13-20

It is good to be back. It's good to be back home. I was gone for 84 days during my Sabbatical. The emphasis was rest, study, and travel. According to a fancy sleeping app, I was in bed for an average of 9 hours and 14 minutes. Now, that's some rest. I traveled on two cruises, went to Seattle, flew to Veil Colorado, drove to Rapid City, SD, and then flew home. I read 17 books and wrote over 100 pages. It's good to be back.

While I was gone, the mission and ministry of All Angels continued. Our mission is to bring the living Christ to those inside and outside the church – and that happened! Many many thanks to our leadership team and all you all for participating over the summer.

Today's reading from the Letter to the Romans outlines who the Church is:
We

Who are Many
Are One Body
In Christ.

It starts with “we”. The Church always has been and always will be a “we”. It's not the minister gathered around a bunch of people; it is a bunch of people who gather to minister. While I was away, I still felt a part of the “we”. St. Paul, who wrote to the Church in Rome, addresses the “we” in the beginning. It's not the Apostles who are the Church with everyone else following them; no, it's the “we” – apostles, saints, people who have come before and people who are not yet born; it's everyone.

Who Are Many. Translation of “many” in Greek and English is difficult because it can mean many – like a lot of people – or it can mean many as in a diverse group of people. If someone said, “I have many MnM's” it can mean a lot of candy or it can be a variety of colors. If you throw in all sort of other candy, the same translation rule applies: “I have many candies” can be a lot or a diversity of. If you are wondering what Paul meant by “we, who are many”, consider this. The “Church in Rome” was actually at least three up to seven house churches. Each house church could hold anywhere from 10 to 40 people (these were not giant basilicas like what they had three or four hundred years later). Doing the math, at the highest end, 7 house churches times 40 people equals 280 people. In comparison, Peter (around 20-30 years earlier) had baptized 3,000 people in one day. I'd say that the Church in Rome was “many” in diversity instead of how many.

In Rome, there were all different types of Jewish people (of the different traditions back then) and a bunch of pagans – all who turned to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. “Many” in Paul’s day certainly meant a wide variety of people.

Are One Body. Paul doesn’t stop at the “many” part, he adds “are one”. This makes the passage interesting. Many diverse people with varying religious backgrounds and languages are gathered as one.

In Christ. That’s the totality of it – In Christ, we, who are many, are one body. That’s how it was; that’s how it is today; that is how it will always be.

Back in Paul’s day, there were many divisions in society. Those divisions were reflected in the leading religious groups and identities. And then something happened. Christ came along and suddenly diverse groups of people found unity in the Spirit with one another in Christ. Nothing like this has ever happened before and yet it is still happening today.

I felt that one-ness while I was away. You see, I didn’t actually feel away because I felt the one-ness of one another in Christ.

The thing about removing myself from All Angels and going away for 84 days is that the WE becomes bigger and bigger and bigger. The “we” prior to the Sabbatical was very much the congregation and our ministry. But, by taking a step back, I saw just how big the WE really is – because it doesn’t matter where I was, I felt connected, in Christ to you all. Also while I was gone, Louise Rich, who had celebrated her 103rd birthday, passed away. Now, she moved as I was starting here so I know her by reputation and love from many of you. Yet, we-who-are-many-are-one-body-in-Christ, means she and I and you are connected – even in death. Some new people joined All Angels over this summer. Although I had not met them, we are connected because we are one in Christ. That means there are more out there – people we have yet to meet – who will become one in the great WE in Christ.

Over the 12 weeks of Sabbatical, my heart grew in thankfulness for you and for all of those who did all of this work to keep the mission ministry going. So here at All Angels, the living Christ is brought to those who are inside and those who are outside the church. My heart grows in joy and thankfulness for all the traditions, for all the many varied ways that we celebrate and know God through Christ. And that no matter where we are in life and even in death, we who are many are one body in Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.