

THE FIRST 15

Monday, November 11, 2024

By: Jan Davis

As we endeavor to build our lives on Christ the Cornerstone, we see how God's grace moves us from self-concern to concern for others.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed and holy Lord God, I come to this quiet place to spend some time alone with You. I quiet my noisy thoughts and still my restless body. I breathe deeply and slowly, inhaling the promise of Your love and peace. Open my heart to receive a fresh experience of Your Holy Spirit. Open my ears to hear the message You have for me today. Open my mind to sympathize with the struggles and disappointments of others. Open my mouth to offer words of kindness and encouragement. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 24b-27

REFLECTION

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul offers a lengthy metaphor comparing the church to the human body. He simultaneously speaks both of the unity of the body and of its diversity. The Body of Christ, the Church, is made up of many different people and they are all equally important. We are united as one together and there should not be divisions, cliques or separations. Paul encourages us to show concern for one another because just like our human body, if one part suffers, we all suffer. If one part is honored, we all celebrate.

If I wake up one morning with a toothache, a backache, or a headache, I may have difficulty functioning that day because of the pain of one of my members. If one part of my body suffers, it has the capacity to ruin my entire day and negatively impact everything. My primary and immediate focus would be to alleviate the particular pain of my tooth, back or head. I would likely prioritize that objective above everything else. In the same way, if someone in my community of faith is suffering or experiencing pain of some kind, wouldn't it be appropriate that my primary focus was to seek them out, hear their struggles and do all I can to alleviate their suffering?

That is what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ. I do my part and use my gifts, talents and abilities to build up the entire community. I celebrate the achievements and

successes of my brothers and sisters with sincere joy. I empathize with the challenges, difficulties and disappointments of my brothers and sisters with sincere sorrow. I can also expect to experience these reactions from the Christians around me - celebration in times of joy and empathy in times of suffering.

I consider how Paul's vision for the church as one body is realized today. Have I experienced this kind of unity in my church home? Have others treated me with kindness and concern? Do I have empathy for other Christians in my own heart? Do I rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep? If this seems like a far-off, pie-in-the-sky, pollyanna dream to me, I am thankful for sanctifying grace. It may be true that Christians have a way to go to live up to Paul's one-body, shared-concern, undivided church community. Yet God's grace is at work, in my church home, in the lives of believers and in my own heart. God is bringing us closer to understanding one another, breaking down walls, healing divisions, opening eyes, and touching hearts. That is what God does - always moving us forward to be the Body of Christ redeemed by His blood.

Ask: When have I positively experienced the church acting as the Body of Christ? When have I negatively experienced the church not acting as the Body of Christ? How might God want to change my thoughts or actions to be more compassionate and sympathetic toward other Christian believers?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

God of grace and mercy, Your vision for Your church as a Body who is connected yet diverse, who rejoices with one another and suffers with one another, is far from realized. Work in me and my church today, connecting people, restoring relationships, healing divisions, uniting hearts, and strengthening bonds. Through the power of Your Holy Spirit sanctify us in Your grace that we may truly love our brothers and sisters in Christ. May we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. May we honor You and glorify Your holy name. Amen.