Sermon Title: "One Body, Many Parts"

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Preacher: Rev. Kim James

Occasion: January 27, 2013, at Wesley UMC--Consecration of 2013 Officers

Introduction

Here's a riddle for you. What's as small as one little pinky finger, yet can contain the content of a million CDs of music or information? No, it's not some new and improved electronic flash drive. In Thursday's newspaper there was a story that told how scientists have now figured out how to store computerized information on strands of human DNA. The biological, "genetic material [that] has long held all the information needed to make plants and animals" could possibly be used to store "huge amounts of information that must be kept for a long time." This process involves "converting the ones and zeroes of digital information into the four-letter alphabet of DNA code." Because this is complicated technology, it will probably only be used for storing large quantities of information that don't need to be retrieved very often. But isn't it amazing? A million CDs of information stored on one pinky-finger-sized strand of DNA.

I'm telling you about this because it helps us think about today's theme. Just as one small strand of DNA can hold millions and millions of pieces of information, so is the one body of Jesus Christ made up of many parts. I invite you this morning to think with me about what that means. What does it mean for us to participate in this one body with many parts?

1. MANY PARTS

First of all, it means there are, indeed, very many parts. If we start with the biggest possible number, we can imagine all those of every country, language, and race who claim Jesus Christ and Christian faith. By one estimation, that would be over two trillion people. That's a lot of parts! Even within just the United Methodist denomination, we have over 11 million
members world-wide. Last week I attended a national United Methodist training event in Nashville which had about 1000 participants from Florida to Alaska. It was really inspirational to sing and pray and learn in that huge room filled with so many others who care about God and the vitality of the denomination and our regional conferences.

Of course, I was also trying to apply my learning to our own particular Wesley United Methodist Church. But even here in our own body of Christ, we have several hundred members, constituents, and visitors who are part of our worship, education, fellowship, and mission outreach. Even in the smallest, local unit of the body of Christ, we have very many parts.

2. **MANY VALUABLE PARTS**

Just because we have many parts, though, doesn't mean that some aren't necessary. The one body of Christ is made up of many *valuable* parts. That's a major theme of this passage of scripture in 1 Corinthians 12. Every part of the body is essential. No part is more or less important than the others. All parts are necessary for the body to function. All parts belong. All parts are valuable.

Have you ever put together a jigsaw puzzle only to discover that there was a piece missing? Maybe it was stuck inside the box. Maybe it fell on the floor. Maybe the dog ate it. How unsatisfying it is to go to all that effort to fashion all those pieces into one lovely picture, only to have it marred by a missing piece. No matter the color, the pattern, or the shape, every puzzle piece is valuable--and the same is true with the parts in the body of Christ.

Sure, we all know that some body parts get more regular use than others. Most of us use our mouths for chewing a whole lot more than we use our leg and arm muscles for exercising. But that doesn't mean our arms and legs are unnecessary! We very much need them, even if
they're weak and flabby. And the body of Christ is similar. Some parts get used and developed more than others, but every part is important.

Some parts of Christ's body are out front and noticeable. They make a joyful noise like our choir. They teach classes, serve as liturgists, give Moments for Mission, and lead committee meetings. Other parts of the body are quiet and behind the scenes. But that doesn't mean we could get along without them, or that they are any less valuable. These quieter parts make repairs to our facilities, plan months in advance for Vacation Bible School, count the offerings, prepare food for fellowship, visit shut-ins, invite friends and family to worship, and sign checks to pay the church's bills.

The original plan for today was not only to commission our 2013 Wesley officers, but also to give a Quiet Disciple award to Susan Frank. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to be here today because of the death of Larry's father. So we'll give her the award next Sunday, instead, because Susan is the kind of person who quietly and faithfully does the work of Christ among us. Strong or weak, quiet or noisy, backstage or in the limelight, every member of the body is essential. The body is made up of many valuable parts.

3. MORE VALUABLE TOGETHER

Of course, even valuable parts aren't much good all by themselves. Our parts are more valuable together. The miracles of modern medicine allow doctors to take kidneys and livers and even hearts out of one person and transplant them into another person. In between, those organs are often placed in an ice chest and transported by helicopter or airplane to a distant place. Somehow the organs are kept alive during that window of opportunity. But if the transport would take too long, or the recipient's surgery would be delayed, the organ would die. Body
parts can't live alone. They need blood and oxygen. They need the other resources and functions of the body to be strong and vital.

We parts of Christ's body are most valuable if we are together. Earlier in this chapter of First Corinthians 12, Paul writes about spiritual gifts that are given to each member of Christ's body. No member is without some kind of gift. Everyone has been given some special ability. But, you know what? These gifts aren't given for us to hoard and enjoy all by ourselves. Verse seven says they are "given for the common good." On our own, we may not even realize that we have any spiritual gifts. But when we get involved in the body of Christ, we become aware of needs. When we see those opportunities for service and ministry, we feel called and motivated to use the talents, skills, and interests the Holy Spirit has given us. And that makes us stronger both individually and collectively.

In the late 1990s, Steve and I took a trip to Europe. While we were in England, in a restaurant, I read a note at the bottom of the menu. It was a reference to the V.A.T., the Value Added Tax. I remember that because it was a new concept for me. I don't think we have anything quite like that here in the United States. The concept of a value added tax is that the meat, potatoes, vegetables, and various seasonings in our dinner all had a value to start with. But when the chef carefully and deliciously prepared them, value was added. When tossed in a salad or marinated in a sauce, the individual ingredients added up to more value than they were originally worth. That's how it is with us parts of Christ's body. Each one of us has value, but we have a lot more value together.

4. UNITED BY THE SPIRIT

Together. Hmmm. Sometimes that's the hard part, isn't it? Maybe we don't feel like we belong or fit in with this particular body. Maybe we aren't sure we want to share our spiritual
gifts with this motley crew of body parts. That's when we need to realize that the body of Christ isn't just a bunch of random body parts thrown together. We are united by the Holy Spirit.

The movie *Apollo 13* came to my mind this week. Do you remember that part of the movie where the spaceship was in jeopardy and the astronauts could have easily died? One of the complications was that the air filter had quit working and the carbon dioxide level was dangerously high. So the scientists at Mission Control had to quickly find a way to retrofit some square filters to fit a round hole. They could only use items that were available on the spacecraft. It took some doing, but the team at Mission Control was able to put some odd pieces together, create a solution, and talk the astronauts through the same life-saving procedure on their vessel.

I'm thinking the Holy Spirit is kind of like that Mission Control team. The Holy Spirit takes us body parts who are available and turns us into something both life-saving for us and life-giving for others. Sure, it would be nice to have more-talented body parts and more of them. It would be nice to have parts that work together more smoothly. But in this body of Christ we call Wesley United Methodist Church, maybe we already have what we need. We just have to allow the Holy Spirit to do some creative engineering with us. Like duct tape, twine, and Gorilla glue, the Holy Spirit can be the adhesive that unites us and holds us together.

**CONCLUSION**

When all systems are functioning properly, we are the many valuable parts united together by the Holy Spirit. We are the body of Christ. We are one, and we are many. We are many, and we are one.

*Malcolm Ritter, AP, "Digital info can be store in DNA cells, *The Pueblo Chieftain*, 1/24/13, p. 10B.*