

## ‘ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE’

1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27

When I was a boy, my best friend was David Shaffer. David and I were next-door neighbors on South Lake Howard Drive in Winter Haven, Florida. This was the 1950s, long before cell phones and video games, computers and internet, megabytes and twitter feeds. A time when kids still played outdoors instead of playing with electronic devices.

And play we did, as far as our imaginations would carry us. On the nearby canal we were marauding pirates. In the adjacent woods we were big-game hunters in search of mythical beasts: a geriatric lion named Leo; a mischievous monkey named Joe.

At times, David and I were The Three Musketeers, even though there were only two of us. I can still see us: young, blonde-headed, bare-footed, shirtless and suntanned; crossing the two long sticks that passed for swords, and shouting in unison, “One for all, and all for one.” A motto we undoubtedly borrowed from the 1960 movie, “The Three Musketeers,” instead of the 1844 novel by Alexandre Dumas.

“One for all, and all for one.” Even as boys David and I meant the words. “We are united. We are one in purpose. What happens to you matters to me.” Despite all the changes to come—moving, schools, careers, marriage and families—David Shaffer remained my best friend, my fellow Musketeer, until his untimely death at the age of thirty-nine.

“One for all, and all for one.” Look carefully, and you’ll find the same concept, same closeness, and same commitment reflected in today’s text; though with a far better example than The Three Musketeers. To explain the closeness of the Christian Community—“What happens to you matters to me”—the apostle Paul used the illustration of a human body. He did this in 1 Corinthians 12, but also in Ephesians 1 and 4.

And the point of this illustration is simple. The human body has many parts. Each part is important to the well-being, health, and happiness of the whole body. Therefore, the whole body has a vested interest in the circumstances of each part. Said differently, “One for all, and all for one.”

What is true of the human body is equally true of the body of believers, the Holy Christian Church; that which Paul also described as the spiritual body of Christ—of which Christ is the Head and we are the individual parts. As stated in Ephesians 1:22-23, **“And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over**

**everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.”**

“One for all, and all for one.” This is the principle. Sadly, it is not always the practice. Read 1 Corinthians in its entirety and you’ll discover that the Christian congregation in Corinth was not united at all. There were jealousies over spiritual gifts; abuses of Christian liberty; arguments, strife, and hurt feelings. For some, the Lord’s Supper was more of a picnic than a sacrament. Believers sued each other in open court, thereby defaming God’s Name and making a mockery of their congregation and confession. Imagine the sneers, jeers, and cheers of the unbelievers in Corinth: “Look at those Christians. They care nothing for each other. What kind of religion is that? What sort of God do they worship?”

Most of all, there were factions in the Corinthian congregation. The Greek word Paul used to describe these circumstances is SCHISMATA; the source of our English word schism—a split, tear, cut, division. We can easily imagine these Christians standing in small cliques in a church narthex, whispering, eyeing each other suspiciously. And what were they divided over? False teaching? No; though that we could understand. Was the division over unscriptural practices? No; though that we could understand too.

The greatest divisions in the Corinthians congregation were over allegiances to former pastors. To quote Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:11-12, **“My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul;’ another, ‘I follow Apollos;’ another, ‘I follow Cephas;’ still another, ‘I follow Christ.’”** So in the Corinthian congregation there was a Paul Group, an Apollos Group, a Cephas Group, and even a Jesus Group. And each group was lauding its favorite pastor, while demeaning the pastors or leaders of the other groups.

And we wonder: How could the Corinthian Christians have acted this way? How could they have participated in such arguments or lawsuits. How could they feuded over their favorite pastors—over men who had taught them the word of God; which is almost as ironic as Christians fighting over the command to love one another? But then, this type of behavior is not exclusively Corinthian; and it did not end in 57 A.D.

In the 1800s there was a Baptist church in Mayfield County, Kentucky. The church had only two deacons, who were constantly bickering over petty matters. One Sunday, one of the deacons mounted a peg on the church wall where the pastor could hang his hat. When the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged. “Who would do this without consulting me?” he fumed. The matter of the peg was brought to the

elders; the elders brought it to the voters; and the voters brought it to the entire congregation. And at the congregational meeting, the church building was thick with tension and bitterness. Charges were made. Sides were taken. And after that fateful meeting, the church split into two congregations. To this day, the local residents of Mayfield County, Kentucky still refer to these two churches as the “Peg Baptist Church” and the “Anti-Peg Baptist Church.”

Pegs in a wall. The color of the carpet. The location of the organ. The setting of the thermostat. The speaking ability of a pastor or the way in which a pastor shakes hands or designs bulletins. It’s hard to believe that such little things can cause such big divisions in a Christian fellowship; but sadly, they can and they do—as they did in Corinth.

However, one of the reasons Paul wrote 1 Corinthians was to heal these congregational schisms. And the way to do this, Paul knew, was through preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified,”** he wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2. It would be through the same message of Christ and Him crucified that the quarrels in Corinth would end, the schisms would mend, and the wounds would heal.

And so from the outset of 1 Corinthians, Paul based his appeal for Christian unity solely on Jesus Christ.: **“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought,”** 1 Corinthians 1:10. This oneness applied to faith, understanding, teaching, and practice. Paul was not urging these Christians to obtain a oneness they didn’t have; rather, he was urging them to live up to the oneness that they did have as members of one body, Christ’s body, the Christian Church.

**As believers in Jesus Christ, you and I share this same oneness.** This is the first point I want to emphasize this morning. No matter who we are, where we live, what we own, how we speak; our age, finances, personality, favorite foods and least favorite movies—we are all one in Christ Jesus. And this oneness that Christians share through faith in Christ is emphasized throughout the New Testament.

Consider the following three passages. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, **“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”**

Next, Ephesians 4:3-6, **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”**

And then Galatians 3:26-28, **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

Do you realize how revolutionary these statements were in the First Century A.D.; and how revolutionary they still are in 2018? Do you realize what the Gospel accomplished when, after Pentecost, the message of “Jesus Christ Died For All” and “Jesus is Lord of All” spread from Jerusalem throughout the world, bringing together such diverse, formerly antagonist groups as Jews and Gentiles, masters and slaves, wealthy and poor. In a world in which slaves were considered worthless; and, in many cultures, where women were considered property, the Gospel proclaimed **“You are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

How many external differences separate people today? Yet, such differences do not matter before God; because before God we all share in these same two realities: **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,”** Romans 3:23-24.

So, when the Bible says that we, as Christians, are all one in Christ, it’s true. When the Bible calls us “brothers and sisters” in Christ, it’s true. When the Bible tells us that we are the children of God through faith in Christ—born again through the same Holy Spirit; rejoicing in the same hope of salvation; heirs of the same eternal inheritance; it’s true. And this is what makes divisions, strife, envy, arguments, and cliques among Christian congregations so wrong. This is what makes false teaching and false teachers such a tragedy. Along with the dangers they present to faith, they disrupt the unity we actually share with all believers in Christ.

**Second, within the body of Christ, that is, the Christian Church, while external differences—race, color, country, gender, finances, career, education, social status, and so on—do not matter, personal gifts do.** This is the meaning of the phrase “one for all.” One, referring to individuals, to each of us. And God has given each of us gifts to be used for the benefit, well-being, and happiness of the entire Christian Community; and more immediately, for this Christian congregation in Lemmon, South Dakota.

“But I don’t have any gifts,” you may be thinking. Or, “the kind of gifts I have are small compared to the gifts of others.” Or, “I could leave my congregation today, and no one would miss me.” If you are thinking that way, you’re wrong. If you’re thinking that way, you’re thinking like the Christians in Corinth. What did Paul tell them? Essentially, **“one for all.”**

Or in Paul’s own words: **“Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”**

Each one of us has gifts from God. Each one of us has the gifts God wanted us to have. Each one of us has gifts for the common good, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:7, **“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”** This means that each one of us—whether we’re young or old, organist or lector, voter or pastor, guest greeter or financial contributor—has important gifts. And what makes them important is their importance, your importance, to the whole body of believers. Therefore, to think that your God-given talents and abilities are unimportant to this congregation or the Christian Church is a tragedy. To fail to use those gifts is even worse.

When I was in college and still smoking cigarettes, one of my professors took me aside one day and said, “Mark, you really should stop smoking.” Grinning, I replied, “You mean for health reasons?” “Yes,” he said. “But even more than that, why would you want to deprive the Christian Church of one of its gifts.”

**Finally, the complement to “one for all” is “all for one.”** And this needs no long explanation, does it? If you and I remember that through faith we are all members of Christ’s body, the Christian Church; if we remember how important every member of that body is to the well-being, happiness, and functionality of the whole body; then every member of that body should be the object of our love and concern. Not just the wealthy, but the poor. Not just the young, but the elderly. Not just the healthy and active, but the sick and weak. Not just those in church pews, but those in hospital beds and nursing homes.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:24-27, **“But God has combined the members of the body and has given 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.”**

As we consider the ministry of our own congregation, St. Luke’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, let us remember that it is this kind of genuine love and concern for each other that will tell the world who we are and to whom we belong far better than any church sign, website, advertisement in the Dakota Herald newspaper, or 90-second radio spot on station KBJM.

All those years ago, David Shaffer and I raised two long sticks as swords and pledged in unison the motto of The Three Musketeers. Today, let’s raise our hearts, voices, and Bibles, and say with Scripture: **“One for all, and all for one.”**