

Part of the Body of Christ *Ephesians 4:1-16*

Introduction

On the way home from a Pastor's Conference in Orlando a few years ago, my wife Karen and I took a few extra days of vacation. We stayed on Jekyll Island, just off the southern coast of Georgia. We enjoyed the time of relaxation, but we were pretty much confined to our Air BnB because it rained most of the time we were there. Thankfully the owners of the home had provided a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle for moments like those.

The puzzle was called "World of Dogs." So, we dumped it out on the dining room table, popped some popcorn and went to work. We worked on that puzzle for parts of three days, for several hours each day. It was a hard one! On the night before we were to leave, we determined that puzzle would be completed before we went to bed ... but in the wee hours of the morning we finally admitted defeat.

- Sadly, the next morning we broke up the partially finished puzzle and put it back in the box.
- Maybe the next guest would get it done!

This is the third sermon in a series that seeks to answer the question "Who Am I?" My goal in this series is to help each of us understand and confidently affirm our identity in Jesus, so that ...

When I say, "I am a Christian," what does that mean? Who am I?

Over the previous two weeks we learned that, as Christians, we are built on a firm foundation of faith – a foundation that was laid by the apostles and prophets and given direction by Jesus Christ our cornerstone.

- And we have seen how our spiritual roots need to grow deep into the love of God so that we can flourish in our faith.

Today the image is a very familiar one: "The Body of Christ." It is one of the Apostle Paul's favorite images. He writes about it several times, Here in this text he writes:

From him (Jesus) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:16)

Just like the individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle all belong to the same puzzle, as Christians we are all parts of the Body of Christ.

- Individually, we are disjointed pieces, with no clear picture of who we are and why we exist. On our own we are like the pieces of puzzle still in the box.
- But God's goal for our lives is that we come together as one – one Body – one representation to the world of who Jesus is and what He will do for everyone who puts their trust in Him.

That's why you heard the early verses of this text put so much emphasis on "one-ness":

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. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Seven "ones" in three verses. But it is clear that one-ness does not happen automatically, because the writer of this text finds it necessary to say:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

To achieve that one-ness we have to recognize that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We don't operate in isolation. Individually we are not the whole picture.

Who Am I? I am one part of the Body of Christ.

And when we as those individual parts come together – when we are united as one – a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ is revealed, both to us and to the world around us.

#1: IT IS A PICTURE WHERE WE ALL BELONG

Look at verse 7:

But **to each one of us** grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Ephesians 4:7)

You fit somewhere in the Body of Christ. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you are "apportioned" (the text says) a spiritual gift – a gift of grace. The Greek word is *charis* (from which we get words like charisma.)

This gift is something far different from a natural ability. When you were born into this world God gave you certain natural abilities, perhaps in mechanics, art, athletics, or music.

- In this regard, all men are not created equal, because some are smarter, or stronger, or more talented than others.
- But in the spiritual realm, each believer has at least one spiritual gift no matter what natural abilities he may or may not possess.

A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified.

When you come to that place in your spiritual journey that you know and believe that Jesus died for you, you are "apportioned" (what a great word) a place in the overall picture. You become one part of the Body of Christ. Simply put:

You belong.

#2: IT'S A PICTURE WHERE WE ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Look at verses 11-14:

So Christ himself gave (spiritual gifts) to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Look at what all we accomplish! With your gifts and my gifts, together ...

- We equip God's people for works of service
- We build God's people up so that we all know the truth
- We build God's people up so that we all know Jesus
- We grow people to a point of spiritual maturity
- We become everything Christ wants us to be.

Working together we make a difference.

Now there is a tendency to say, "O Pastor, but I can't do much" or "What I do isn't that important!" Hear me! That's the devil talking! The Bible says that whenever you use that spiritual gift God has given to you, you make a difference.

One week from this Wednesday, you will read in your 5x5 readings the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians. And you will read another one the Apostle Paul's segments on the Body of Christ. To a group of people that thought their contribution to the Body of Christ was insignificant, he wrote:

If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, transparent and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you think you are, you are only a *part* of (the Body). An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. Who we are is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? (1 Corinthians 12:14-24, The Message)

Who are you? You are a part of the Body of Christ, making a difference in the life of every believer in this congregation and beyond.

- We have VBS this week. Because of you, children will hear the story of Jesus – and maybe this will be the time that it takes root.
- We gave One Plus God ministries \$1 100 last Sunday morning. Because of you, the leader told us, women who are trafficked will have opportunities to break free.
- When you use what God has given you, you make a difference.

#3: IT'S A PICTURE WHERE WE ALL MATTER

Look at verse 16:

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, **as each part does its work.** (Ephesians 4:16)

How does this “Body of Christ” stuff succeed? Only as EACH PART does its work.

I learned a new Greek word this week:

συναρμολογουμενον (*sunarmologoumenon*)

This means “a perfect fit.” As a member of the Body of Christ, you are a perfect fit – exactly what this church needs to be what God intends this church to be.

- Some puzzle pieces seem to be interchangeable. But they aren't. If you don't get the right piece in the right spot, the final picture won't be complete.
- You will get stuck and frustrated: Why won't this puzzle come together?

We worked on another puzzle while we were in Texas during my sabbatical. Two pieces were missing. I was so disappointed! All that work, and it wasn't done. Something important was missing.

- Something that had been perfectly designed to fit into those two spaces wasn't there.
- I left a note in the puzzle box for the next person who would give it a try. “Don't be disappointed,” I wrote. “This puzzle is missing two pieces.”

One day God came to Moses on the back side of a mountain where he was tending his father-in-law's sheep.

“Moses!” God said from the burning bush. “I have a job for you. You are the perfect fit for what I am about to do.”

“Not me, Lord,” Moses replied. “I can't do that.”

But Pastor, that was a big job. God has never asked me to do anything that big. My contributions would be so small no one would notice. This church will be fine without me.

- Have you ever heard of Tryphena and Tryphosa?

- What about Persis or Phlegon or Patrobas?
- Who are they? I just told you everything I know about them. Their names. That's it. But mattered deeply to the early church in Rome – so much so that they were singled out by the Apostle Paul in Romans 16. He writes:

“Greet these dear friends. They work very hard in the Lord.” (Romans 16)

They mattered. We all matter.

APPLICATION

On Father's Day this year, one of the presents I opened was ... a puzzle called “World of Dogs.” Karen thought I might need something to do on my sabbatical.

- So today this same puzzle sits that I could not complete on Jekyll Island occupies one end of our dining room table, where it is about 40% complete.

Each piece belongs somewhere, and I am determined to find out exactly where those pieces fit before God takes me to heaven.

As your pastor, I'd like to help you find where you fit as well. Do you know? You do fit here somewhere, you know. Because ...

You are one part of the Body of Christ. That's WHO YOU ARE!

Amen.