

Third Sunday after Epiphany
January 24, 2016
As One of Us Goes, We All Go.
1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26, 27
Rev. George Ferch

Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

My younger brother, Carl, is a fire chief in Michigan. Even though many of his firefighters are volunteers, there is a strong bond among them and the regulars. Their sense of brotherhood is typical of all members of that profession. We saw it in action in New York City after 9/11.

A famous quote from the 1991 film, *Backdraft*, is, "You go, we go." It means that all firefighters are willing to die rather than allow just one to die. What sacrifice, what love, what unity?

We enjoy a great unity as members of the church, the spiritual body of Christ, as well as members of Bethlehem. It is a unity of sacrifice and love for each other founded on Christ's sacrifice and love he carried out for us on the cross.

As One of Us Goes, We All Go. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. The body has varied members. We suffer and rejoice as one.

Divisiveness was killing the congregation in the Greek city, Corinth. Instead of using their various gifts in sync for the common good, the members were proud and arrogant on one hand, or, jealous and envious on the other hand. They forgot this important truth, "For we were 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."

As one of us goes, we all go because we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. The baptismal font is the entrance into the unity we have as members of the church. The Word of Christ washed away the guilt and power of our sins. The Spirit sanctified us by taking us out of unbelief and creating saving faith in Christ in our hearts. With that faith, the Spirit gave us gifts we use for the common good of the other members.

"So it is with Christ." His spiritual body is made up of those many parts. Those parts are you and I and our fellow believers. The church is the spiritual body of Christ. He is the Head. This body is invisible since faith is in the heart. Believers come together in visible churches like Bethlehem to use their gifts. As come together in unity, others see those gifts as we use them to help each other.

As we use those gifts and others see them, as one of us goes, we all go. The body has varied members. Those varied members unite for the common good.

God has arranged those parts. He did not give the same spiritual gifts to everyone. This is just like he did not create us with all hands, or all eyes. One part we do have is not more or less important than another part. The members work together in harmony.

God has given his church the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, speaking God's Word, teaching, and many others through Holy Baptism. The one Spirit distributes his gifts as he creates the body of the church. This is just as God knitted us in our mothers' wombs with our hands, our eyes, our feet, and all our members so that our bodies may function properly.

The body of Christ and Bethlehem need the varied members to use the vast array of spiritual gifts God gave us in Holy Baptism. The proper use of my gifts prevents pride and arrogance as if my gifts were more important and necessary than others. Proper use prevents jealousy and envy

as if my gifts are less important and necessary. We won't say, I don't need you, or, I don't belong to the body.

Through the study of God's Word, prayer, and honest evaluation we are able to discover our spiritual gifts. Just as the head enables all our body parts to work together, Christ our Head enables us to mesh those spiritual gifts with self-sacrifice and sense of unity. The spiritual health of motivation and use of our gifts from the starting point of Jesus' cross eliminates divisiveness and disharmony. In unity we do our Savior's work. As one of us goes, we all go in sacrifice and love.

That unity means we suffer and rejoice as one. When one member of our physical body suffers, the other parts suffer as well, don't they? Think about how when one part of your body hurts and you begin to favor it, often other parts start to hurt because things aren't right. Or, when a member of the family receives an honor, don't all the other members rejoice with them? We are happy for the recognition others have given them.

In the church, both invisible and visible, we suffer with our fellow members because we have equal concern for one another. Our hearts go out to our brothers and sisters in Christ who today are being persecuted for their faith, and in some cases executed for it.

If a fellow Christian receives commendation for using their gifts, we rejoice with them rather than be jealous or angry. We recognize that in God's eyes no gifts are greater than others. We recognize that he has given us our gifts and others theirs and we all are satisfied.

As one of us goes, we all go. We are in the Lord's work together united by the Spirit into Christ through Holy Baptism. The font is the source of our varied gift and our unity. This unity experiences the suffering we each endure and the joy we share. This is our sacrifice, our love, and our unity. Amen. <SDG>