

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, January 26, 2025

“Being the Body of Christ”

## *The Message*

How many people here enjoy doing puzzles?

I love doing puzzles! In fact, I brought one of my puzzles today as a visual aid.

Can anyone tell me which piece of this puzzle is the most important piece?

You really can't tell me which piece is the most important.

But, just because we can't say which specific piece is the most important doesn't mean that none of them are important!

All of the pieces of this puzzle are important. Do you know how I know that?

Because when I put this puzzle together and got to the very end, I realized it's missing a piece.

Right smack dab in the middle of the puzzle, a piece is missing.

That missing piece sure is important! It might even have become the most important piece simply by not being there.

The individual pieces of a puzzle seemingly aren't all that important on their own until one goes missing. Then we realize just how important each and every piece is if we want a whole and complete puzzle!

Sometimes I think we see ourselves as puzzle pieces within our family, our community, or our church.

Sometimes we believe we aren't all that important in the grand scheme of things.

Or, we believe that we have to do more, say more, be more, or be better in order to matter to others or to God.

I talked with someone once about baptism, and they said they just weren't sure because they didn't feel they were worthy. They didn't go to church enough, they didn't feel they followed the Bible well enough, and they didn't read scripture or pray enough.

I'm sad to say that church often teaches people to believe that because they aren't good enough Christians, they are unworthy of God's grace.

Often, people think they must be perfect before they can enter God's kingdom or receive God's grace and love.

People think they must be the perfect puzzle piece – the best piece in the box, shining before God and perfectly molded to fit into whatever box the church has taught them they must fit into.

But we hear Paul saying something different in his letter to the Corinthians.

How many of the people of Corinth do you think were feeling unworthy to be part of the Christian community?

I'm guessing quite a few if Paul had to tell them these things.

The passage right before today's was the one we heard last week about spiritual gifts.

Paul is working hard to convince the people of Corinth that *they* matter! Not only do they matter to God, but they matter to each other.

Paul uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate his point.

He says, "The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does."

He goes on to say that no matter our background, no matter our current position in life, we are each baptized by the Spirit and have been made a part of the Body of Christ.

Just like our bodies don't have just one part, neither does the church body have just one part.

One might argue that unlike a puzzle, in which all pieces are equally important, our bodies do have some parts that are more important than others.

However, tell that to someone who is missing one of those "insignificant" parts!

The parts of our bodies all work together to help us function.

Certainly, we can get by without some parts of our bodies.

However, try telling someone who had major organ issues that certain parts aren't important!

My dad had heart issues. That particular body part is pretty darn important. But, when they treated the issues he had with his heart, that process destroyed his kidneys.

Fixing the kidneys required impacting his already weakened heart.

Not to mention the toll his medications took on his GI tract, his liver, and his muscles!

Paul's point, as he says, is that "God put our bodies together in such a way that even the parts that seem the least important are valuable. He did this to make all parts of the body work together smoothly, with each part caring about the others. If one part of our body hurts, we hurt all over. If one part of our body is honored, the whole body will be happy."

Likewise, we are all part of the body of Christ.

Each one of us, with our own unique gifts and talents, with our own fears and insecurities, are part of Christ's body.

Each one of us is worthy to be a part of Christ's body, and that is important for us to remember.

We don't just believe *in* Christ, we are a part *of* Christ! And in this way, it is an honor to be part of Christ's body.

Jesus was not raised from the dead as an individual, Jesus was raised from the dead in a community.

And, to this day, we have the privilege of being a part of that community!

And in that unity with Christ, we are not called to merely love one another. We are all a part *of* each other.

Paul is suggesting something much bigger than ourselves.

Paul is suggesting that we are all connected; we all have something to offer; and we all *need* each other.

We need each other's individual gifts, all of us different and all of us necessary, like all the different organs in a body, or parts of a living cell.

All the parts are distinct, but only as part of the whole. So when you love your neighbor as yourself you don't just love them as much as you love yourself, you love them as part of yourself, *as yourself!*

This is a radical suggestion that Paul is making, because it sure can be difficult to love some people as much as we try to love ourselves, let alone to love them as *part of ourselves!*

Think about someone you know of who you find incredibly difficult to be around, or who holds such vastly different views from you that you just cannot fathom loving them.

Now, imagine loving that person as a part of yourself.

That is not easy!

But, in some ways, it might be easier to think about loving the parts of ourselves that we don't always like. Perhaps the person that came to mind has some qualities that you see in yourself that you don't always like.

If we think about it in this way, we could imagine working to love those parts of ourselves that we don't always like, and then working to try to love other people as though they are also a part of us.

It makes me think about Paul's example of the eyes saying they don't need the hands, or the head saying it doesn't need the feet.

Maybe sometimes our heads *think* we don't really need our feet.

But at the end of the day, it would be much harder for our heads to navigate the world without our feet, and it would be difficult for our eyes to navigate the world without our hands.

Our eyes cannot pick things up and hold them. Our eyes cannot know how something feels merely by looking at it.

Our eyes cannot hug a loved one, or hold our partner's hand, or play an instrument, or determine if something is hot or cold.

Likewise, we may think we don't need certain people in our lives, and perhaps we don't need to be close to them. But those people we don't fully understand or don't get along with are valuable to the world, too.

They are also a valuable part of the body of Christ. Without them, the body is not whole.

So, as Paul encouraged the people of Corinth to love one another and think of each other as members of the same body, let us leave here with a better understanding of what it means to be part of the body of Christ.

Let us remember that we are worthy of God's love and we are a welcome addition to the body of Christ, and so are our neighbors, our friends, our families, and even our "enemies."

May we remember that we are called not just to love one another as we love ourselves, but to love others as a *part* of ourselves.

May we remember that we all help to bring wholeness to the body of Christ. We are connected and we need each other just as we need God.

This may not always be an easy task, but it is a necessary task as we imagine a world in which all people are worthy to sit at the table with Christ as part of his body. Amen.

Spirit of the living God, we praise and adore you for empowering us to claim membership of the body of Christ, a gift received through the fullness of your grace. Remind us that we are all members of the one body and if one member suffers, we all suffer. May we, as the body of Christ in this place, be the best evidence of your love by declaring and witnessing to this as the year of the Lord's favour for all people. We give thanks that all of us are Christ's body, and rejoice in each one being a part of it. Accept our adoration and praise for these great gifts. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.