Our text last week, if you recall, showed us the variety of gifts that are being offered by the Holy Spirit and how each of us are gifted in so many different ways and fashion. These gifts are intended to be used for the greater purposes and the glory of God. This week, Paul continues to address the early church more specifically on how their gifts may complement and fit together in harmony with one another.

The same message that applied to the early church more than 2000 years ago then still remains applicable for us today. Talk about how scripture may be timeless and yet, contextually relevant at the same time.

In light of the current climate which our country is in right now, when the *State of the Union* seems to be in a disarray or in a political limbo, the basic moral fabric of our democracy is hanging by a thread or literally being shut-down, our text this morning fittingly invites us to examine OUR own ***State of CommUnion***. By that I mean, where does the body of Christ fit together in spite of our differences and challenges that are presented before us. Can we strive to work through our differences without having to compete or against one another for the common good?

**Diversity is meant to be a gift from God and not a mean of division or claiming superiority of one group of individuals over another!** Some argue that the state of our church today (that’s the Church with the capital “C”) is more divisive than ever before. There are many more churches being established, not due to expansion or growth, but due to division and dissentions among those who may have different opinions in terms of governance or doctrinal interpretation differences. I don’t think that’s what God had in mind when it comes to the diversity of the body as we are being called to live in one accord, with the same mind and of the same heart. Certainly not what we proclaim when we declare that we drink from the same cup or eat from the same bread whenever we celebrate the Communion of Christ!

In our text this morning, Paul outlined for us the *State of CommUnion* for the body of Christ. He challenges us the church to take on a deeper level of commitment for the body of Christ. Not only do we simply use our God given spiritual gifts, but we must use them wisely and constructively for the upbuilding of the church and for the benefit of those around us.

As I shared with you last week, the problem with the Corinthian church had to do with spiritual hierarchy that some religious leaders who claimed that they were spiritually “better-off” or more righteous than others, especially over those who were new to faith or just joining into the community, despite the fact that they shared one faith, one Lord, one baptism…or at least so they claimed.

In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul emphasized the importance of unity within the **body of Christ.** What happens to one part of the body, affects the other. Like our human body, let’s say if you’re feeling cold your brain will signal your hands and your feet to get a hat or a jacket to put on, in order to stay warm. One part of the body informs the others in order to overcome any adversities and challenges. Likewise, different parts of the body of Christ must also work together and co-operate with one another, in order to fulfill a common mission together.

Paul used the human anatomy to describe how the church ought to function and that we are all **inter-connected to** as well as **inter-dependent of** one another. Do you know that there are 206 bones, 639 muscles and 6 lbs of skins along with ligaments, cartilage, veins, arteries, blood, fat on a human body, if any part of this is experiencing problems or deficiencies, the whole system will invariably be affected and sometimes that could be fatal.

The same goes with the body of Christ – the Church. We are not alone. There are different levels of the church, even just among the *Presbyterian Church* itself. There are the General Assembly (which is the national denominational church), the Synod (which is the regional body in the Northeast), and then there is the Presbytery (in our case, the NYC Presbytery, which consists of over 92 congregations from all boroughs and representing a different array of God’s people from all walks of life) who happen to be dropped by God into the same city. One of the great prides that the Presbyterians take is that we are a “connectional” church with individual unique flavors and historic significance. We are NOT alone. We grieve together and we rejoice together, just as Paul stated, *if one member suffers, we all suffer together. And if one member is honored (or rejoiced), we all honor and rejoice together.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

The *State of our CommUnion* reminds us that we are all One-in-Christ and that we are **bound together by our common baptism of the same Spirit and our collective confession of faith in Christ.** Christ is our common denominator who ties us all together while breaking down any barriers or walls (whether it is physical or metaphorical) that we may claim to put up among ourselves or against our neighbors.

We are called to be in community with one another. Most people like to be amongst those whom they feel belong to or fit in rather than standing out as individuals. Keep in mind that there is a distinction between **belong** and **belonging**. **To belong** means that you are part of a larger entity, an organization, or some community establishment. It’s more **externally connected**. **To discover one’s belonging**, on the other hand, is deeper than that. It’s more **internally connected**. It means that we take ownership of the life and well-beings of the body, not just extracting from the body but contributing to the body.

Keep in mind that unity does not mean that we would all agree with one another on every issue, for God created us uniquely different and granted us the ability to see things from different perspectives. Unity means that we see beyond our differences, yet can still function, respect and honor one another in spite of…for the sake of the unity of the body.

As Paul mentioned in our text this morning, “*the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor the head to the feet ‘I have no need of you.’”* As one theologian wrote, “*God has made each one indispensable to the whole – hands, feet, ears, eyes – and given each an essential role: apostle, teachers, leaders, healers, and so on*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Last Sunday, we held our annual congregational meeting, in which we affirmed one another’s commitment to the body of Christ by responding to God’s calling in our lives, serving as elders and deacons of the church. Keep in mind that ALL of us are called to be actively involved in this team ministry together, not just those who bear the titles. However, those who do, carry greater responsibilities as well as disciplines. We are reminded that **Christ is the Vine and we are only the branches and apart from the Vine, we can do nothing and cannot bear any fruits of our own.** *For God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chooses.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Friends, through our baptism, **we have discovered our own sense of belonging under the sovereignty of God.** The body of Christ, must strive to embrace one another’s differences and to carry out God’s ministry of reconciliation and grace here on earth together.

As the esteemed theologian Karl Barth once characterized the church as ***the product not of its sociological structures or institutional arrangements but of its relation to Jesus Christ.[[4]](#footnote-4)*** Each of us are being called together, in different functions and roles, in relationship with Christ, AND more importantly with one another. Authenticity builds lasting relationship and community with one another. There is much **Grace** to be discover. There is much **Love** to be embraced and there is much **Hope** that we may strive for.

In the most recently adopted confession of faith of the Presbyterian Church – the *Belhar Confession*, one part of the statement confesses that “*the unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope.”*

**The unity of the Spirit is proclaimed whenever we come together in worship, in fellowship and prayer, and in the breaking of the bread.** Whenever we do that, we fulfill our common calling as God’s hands and feet to this world, while tangibly demonstrate the presence and the expression of God’s love.

In closing, I would like to share with you a familiar expression that pretty much sums up our meditation this morning. We’re not quite sure whose the author is, but it goes like this….“***Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.”*[[5]](#footnote-5)**

Friends, as extensions of Christ’s hands, feet, eyes, and ears, let us honor one another’s gifts as God entrusted in us, by claiming the commUnion of the Spirit within us and around us. As Jesus declared, whenever and wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name, he is here amongst us[[6]](#footnote-6) as we experience the fullness of our communal God – Three-in-One, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *I Corinthians 12:26* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Stokes, Karen Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 1, P.282* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *I Corinthians 12:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV/1, ed. G. W. Gromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T.Clark, 1936-62), 663-64.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Craigo-Snell Shannon, *Connections Year C, Volume 1,* P.200 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Matthew 18:20* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)