

**“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”**

***“What Can You Do For Your Church?”***

I am sixty-three years old. How many of you are younger than I am? You will notice that I didn't ask how many of you were older than I am, because I didn't want to call you out. But if you are my age or older, you remember John F. Kennedy. We all remember the day he was assassinated, because if you were in school, it seemed as if for a moment time stood still.

Do you remember what John F. Kennedy's most famous quote was? In his inaugural address on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1961, he challenged the nation with these words. “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Those words called upon our patriotism and our love for our country. And there were many who listened. Thousands of young people in our country joined the Peace Corps so that they could make a difference, not only in our country, but in our world. Unfortunately, the Viet Nam War seemed to put out the fires of that patriotism and enthusiasm.

Can I use his words and alter them only a little. “Ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church?” This place is not a McDonald's, where you drive in and sit for an hour and wolf down a quick meal of God's Word. This is not a place where you come when you want to get baptized, confirmed, married and buried. You are not just consumers, you are part of something that is truly wonderful and miraculous. *You are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it.*

**1. You don't deserve to be in the body of Christ, but you are!**

I want you to think about that for just a little while. Jesus is the head of the church and you are the body of Christ. You belong to something much bigger than yourself. You belong to something which is even bigger than this congregation we call St. Peter Lutheran Church. You are the body of Christ. You belong to the HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. Someday you will be there in heaven with a multitude that no one can count from every tribe and language and nation and people. I am happy that our congregation is starting to look more like that church in heaven. We have Hispanic Christians and black Christians and German Christians. That's what a church should look like. It should reflect not just OUR culture but Christ's mission for his church

But just imagine. You are the body of Christ. You don't deserve that. I don't either. What did you do today to make yourself worthy of this honor? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Being a member of a church doesn't make you part of the body of Christ. Giving generously does not make up for the mountain of sins you've committed in your lifetime. There is nothing you can ever do that would make God love you more than he already does.

And there is nothing you have ever done that could make God love you less than he does right now. Have you ever done anything that would exclude yourself from a place in God's Holy Christian Church? Of course you have. You sin every single day. You mouth off to your parents. You pick on your brothers or sister or classmates. You have judgmental thoughts in your hearts and gossip on your lips.

In those moments that you are not getting along with your spouse, you are probably having an argument running through your head all day long. Why in the world would Jesus want you, or me, in his Church?

That's what God's amazing grace is all about. Jesus has called you out of this world of sin to be his own dear people. You are his holy, redeemed people. Your sins have been forgiven and your sins are being forgiven every single day. You don't just belong to St. Peter Lutheran Church. You belong to the HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. You are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

## **2. Your work in the body of Christ is important**

Friends, I want you to think about this relationship that you have with Jesus just a little more deeply. Jesus is called the head of his church and you are called to be his body. The body is a wonderful thing, and amazing creation of God. Your fist could smash through a plate glass window and it could also brush an eyelash out of your child's eye. You can train your fingers to run over a piano and make beautiful music or float across a clarinet and make a song. You can type a hundred words a minute because your mind can process all those letters without even thinking what you are doing. It all starts in your head, which sends the signals, and is carried out by your fingers, or feet, to do the work.

It is the same with Jesus and his Church, which is his body. Jesus doesn't do his work in this world without you. Let me say that again. Jesus doesn't do his work in the world without you. He doesn't send angels to be missionaries to China. He sends you. He doesn't make his angels stuff the bulletins every week. He uses you. He doesn't come down and sit with children in the Sunday School classrooms. He uses you to teach those lessons. He doesn't visit the shut-ins. He doesn't talk to people from the community to invite them to church. He doesn't tell them the story of salvation while they are eating their lunch at work. He uses you. He doesn't pick up his shepherd's staff and look high and low for one of his lost sheep. He uses you. **You are the body of Christ and each one of you is part of it.**

Do you see why every one of you is important? You heard Paul talk about it in the epistle lesson. **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."** 1 Cor 12:15-18 Our body is made of many parts, so what if we gave up one of this little parts we don't use very often? Let's say your little finger. It's not very strong. It doesn't do the work of the index finger or the thumb. Can you get along without it? I suppose you could ....but then how would you type on your keyboard and reach the q or the backspace button. How would you play your saxophone or clarinet? Do you see why every one of you is important?

**You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it.** So what you can you for your church, for the body of Christ?

**1. You can come to church every Sunday and bring someone with you.** In Hebrews 10: 25 it says, **" Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one**

**another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** There is a phrase that was used on a commercial some time ago. “Friends don’t let friends drive while intoxicated.” I would like to borrow that phrase. “Christians don’t let their friends stop coming to church.” We care for each other. We encourage each other. At our council meeting last Monday Nate Otto was wandering about the low percentage of our members that attended church each week. He bragged about his church in Nashville, which had 60 percent attendance. Well, Nate, I checked the records, and you were wrong. Last year it was 64 percent! What more could we do in this community if we had 60 percent of our members in church every Sunday? Something you can do for your church, for the body of Christ, is to encourage each other.

- 2. You can study God’s Word.** As district president, I work with troubled congregations. Sometimes there is a controversy that’s tearing them apart. Sometimes they just don’t know why they exist as a Christian congregation. When I sit down and analyze their situation, the real reason is that the members of that congregation are not studying God’s Word. They act like consumers who think their pastor should be doing a better job, but who do not understand that they are the body of Christ. One of the things I’ve done to get them back on course is to challenge every member of the congregation to go through a Bible information class, a refresher course if you will. I don’t see this congregation as a troubled congregation, but we can still grow stronger. I would challenge every one of you today to do the same thing. I would invite every one of you to attend at least one Bible class with your fellow Christians every week. It is God’s word which makes us strong. What if we had thirty more people come to Bible class? Or fifty? Our church would grow stronger and more fit for service in the body of Christ. What else can you do for your church?
- 3. You can use the gifts which God has given you in some way to serve him.** Each of you is unique. God made you what you are and gave you all kinds of abilities and talents. When Jesus redeemed you, he redeemed all of you for his body, the church. Here is a crazy idea. Tithe your time. You work 40 hours a week. Give four hours to the Lord. Many of you are doing much more than that. If you counted up all the volunteer hours that members give for serving on committees or teaching Sunday school or visiting members, it would be amazing. How are you using your abilities and time in the body of Christ? If you would like to explore with one of your pastors what you could do to improve your service in the body of Christ, we are happy to do that.
- 4. Finally, you can pray and pray with confidence.** You are the body of Christ and each of you is a member of it. If my little finger has a sliver in it, it sends a message to my brain to tell me. Then my brain sends a message to the rest of my body parts to grab a tweezers and pull the sliver out. You are also connected to Jesus in the same way, and he always hears your prayers. So pray! Pray for people in our church by name, when you hear that someone is ill. Pray for your pastors that God would fill them with his Holy Spirit and help them in their ministry. Pray for that member who hasn’t been coming to church. If you are stuffing bulletins, you can pray for each of those people who have a full box. Pray for our outreach events, that God would use them to bring the word to more families. Pray for our school and the children in it. Pray for our elders and those who visit prospect members.

Remember, you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it. Do not ask, what your church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church. Amen.