

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

Rev. Edward A. Bellis, IV

Sermon

January 24, 2010

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

1225 Piper Boulevard, Naples, FL 34110

Body Talk

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Paul writes to the church in Corinth and tells them “We are the body of Christ...” He doesn’t say we are like a body. Simply and profoundly Paul tells them, and us, “We are Christ’s body.” Paul expands the body image by saying some are hands, some are eyes, and some are toes.” **In other words, we all of us have an important role in the body of Christ, even the smallest member.**

In November, I was turning a corner in my house. I cut the corner to close and stubbed my little toe on my right foot. The hurt was tremendous. After icing it down and putting it up for awhile, the pain subsided to a dull throb. Yet, when I tried to walk on it for the rest of that day, I couldn’t move far. My little toe brought me to a standstill. The toe, that I’ve often wondered “what’s its purpose”, kept me from driving to the grocery store, mowing grass, and cooking lunch. My little toe is important to my body. Although I was healthy in every other way, when I hurt it I wasn’t able to accomplish my full potential.

Such a simple example illustrates that we are all important in the work of Christ. No one part is more important than another. When Paul says, “The hand cannot say to the foot, “I have no need of you.” His point is well taken. Whether we are singing in the choir, folding the church’s worship bulletins, a member of the Session, a first time visitor, a new member received today, whatever our role may be we are all important! (As an aside, if you are wondering about your gifts John Rist or Dr. Harp or myself would be happy to give you our Spiritual gifts inventory. You may be surprised at what your gifts are and how they might be used for the glory of God.)

I like the story about Marian Anderson. For those of you who don’t know her, Ms. Anderson was a famous contralto who once sang outside the Lincoln Memorial, and the concert was arranged after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let her perform at Constitution Hall because she was black. Ms. Anderson was once asked why she always used the first person plural, ‘we’, instead of a simple ‘I’ when she spoke about herself and her ability to sing. I like her response.

"Possibly," she said, "Because the longer one lives, the more one realizes that there is no particular thing that you can do alone. With the execution of the work that we do there are many people, those who wrote the music, those who made the piano on which the accompanist is playing, the accompanist who lends support to the performances... So the ‘I’ in it is very small indeed." Ms. Anderson was right! We are all needed. I need you, you need me, and God needs us. We are the body of Christ and we are each important, and no one part greater than another.

If each of us has an important role, we must perform our role in the body for the body to work properly. In other words, for the body to be its best we need to be actively doing our job. Christianity isn’t a spectator sport. We are not to come to church on occasion, listen to a sermon, go home, and not do something. Each of us is essential to the body for its effective work to move into the hurting world.

Close your eyes for a moment! Keep them closed. Now try and go home without opening your eyes. How will we drive a car? How will we leave the pews without bumping into things? Open your eyes. Now try the same thing with your hands. What if we had no hands? How will we eat? How will we hold the bulletin or

hymnal? Paul says, “We are the body of Christ!” We are to work together and everyone needs to do their part. Find out what that role is and do it.

One more aside, the image of the body of Christ strikes at the heart the individualism in our society. Just me, myself and I is not Christian living. To be a follower of Christ is to become a family member. Community is not optional for the Christian. That is why our governing document in the Presbyterian Church, the Book of Order, mandates that we take communion to our shut-ins. The table isn’t complete and the service isn’t complete until all are served. All are important in the eyes of God and that is seen around this table.

Yet, if we are able, we cannot sit at home and watch the local preacher on the television and be a faithful follower of Christ. We cannot say, “I will go to the golf course and commune with nature.” Yes, God can be experienced there. But, we must respond and come forward to this table (our Lord’s Table) and be reminded of his sacrifice and his resurrection. We find our meaning and purpose, the ‘who’ we are and ‘whose’ we are, around this table in a community. Our call to this table each Sunday is a family reunion. We are part of a family. We are members of a royal priesthood. We are hands, and eyes, and toes on the body of Christ – who is our head.

So, we all have a job. What might that job be? Some of us are compassionate listeners and would make excellent Stephen’s Ministers. Some of us have the gift of helping and we could build homes, or help on Wednesdays with our ministry with those struggling financially. We could be active in the evangelism by quietly inviting our friends and family to share in our faith journey. Some of us work well with little children and might want to deliver the children’s sermon. The list goes on and on. Each of us has unique gifts and it is important that we use those gifts to serve the body.

In October, during the children’s sermon I brought in a simple puzzle. I handed out the pieces to the kids and they helped me put together the puzzle. Yet, there was a problem. I intentionally kept one piece. They couldn’t complete the puzzle. I said, “We cannot complete the puzzle. We are missing an important piece. Look out in the congregation. Notice how many places are available to bring friends and family to come to this special place called the church. We are not complete until we bring people to this place and fill it up.” Children and adults are important in the eyes of God. “For they will come from east and west, north and south and sit at table in the kingdom of God.” “For we are neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, young or old, we are one in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

With all that said, we must be careful not become a church based on our works. **Our works are important, yet we must rely on the Spirit of the living God.** The Holy Spirit is what activates and motivates our works. When we rely on the Spirit, we will accomplish far more than we dream.

The Body of Christ filled with the Spirit of God is alive and creative and wonderful. Put on the spectacles of our faith and we will see a glimpse of what we can do in his name. Look at the number of great universities, hospitals, and great benevolent societies begun in the name of Christ. Look at the lives touched through the church’s work in New Orleans, Africa and Haiti. Look with the businesses changed with our letter writing campaigns and boycotts. The church is an institution unlike any other in this world and the reason is that our founder didn’t just die 2000 years ago. He rose from the dead too. He is seated at the Father’s right hand interceding for us. And he is still with us breathing life into us who are his followers. He who still beckons with the call, "Follow me." Will we choose to follow?

We are his body. We all have important roles in Christ’s body and we must be doing our role for the body’s good health. Most importantly of all, we must remember Christ is alive and he is with us still.