



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

This morning I am going to do something that I rarely do and that is not preach on the Gospel. It is the first section of a twofold reading from Luke that deals with Jesus not being well accepted in his hometown. And so, there is plenty of time to deal with that next Sunday. But for today, it is in my heart to look at the 1st Corinthians text. Paul here is writing a letter to the Corinthians with the primary concern of unifying the body of Christ. And isn't that a fitting topic today as we hold our annual meeting here at CTS. One body made up of many members all with their own special God given gifts. Gifts that were not earned, but rather given by God's grace. It is important for the church to be united. It is also important for it to recognize the value of its diversity. What an awesome vision. All separate members of the body of Christ, which is one body filled with forgiveness, grace, and love.

This week, I was again reminded that we have so many gifted people here at Christ the Servant. I was sick with the flu and unable to come in to meet with the confirmation students on Wednesday. Margaret willingly agreed to fill in and lead the lesson. And then as is our policy that we have more than one adult when children are present. I called Ginny Bosse and she graciously agreed to come in and sit with the confirmation class. Just one example of how the church, our church depends on the skills of the congregation to

maintain the integrity of our mission. We have such an amazing volunteer resource base to do all the work of the church here in Park Falls.

In a small church it is often the situation that a congregation becomes pastor centered. That is where the pastor knows all that is going on and does much of the business of the congregation. Here I continue to try to empower members of the congregation to assume some of the responsibilities the church will need to survive. You all know that I am not good at shoveling snow and can no longer lay on the floor in the boiler room to get it started on a Sunday morning. Well, I probably could but would find it hard to get back up! So, we must share in the maintenance of this building as well as the mission of the church.

As Paul said, "there are many members, yet one body." Our little church is made up of a variety of different people providing different functions. Each one of us is unique in the gifts we possess, but we are all connected in this one body called Christ's church.

Along with the gifts that we all bring, we each have a different personality. Inevitable there will be someone you don't like or one who is quite different than yourself. This can lead to discord and problems. But when God's love is truly visible, those differences seem slight. It is much easier to be an inclusive church when we focus not on our differences but rather on the things that draw us together. And that happens when we all see and feel the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus died for all of us, not just the smart ones, the beautiful ones, the ones that can fix a broken toilet or those who can sing like a bird. Jesus died for every single one of us regardless of how different or how the same we are to those sitting next to us in the pews.

And that folks is the good news of the gospel of Jesus. He gave up his life to give us all forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. After all, God made each one of us and yes, he made us different.

We find this sort of difference in most groups in our lives. Think with me for a minute, was everyone in your high school English class the same. Did you have the same values, look the same, comprehend the teachings the same. I doubt it. Or how about on your son or daughters little league team? Was each child of the same level of ability? Did each one deal with loss the same way? I

doubt that was the case. So how do we in society bond as a class, a team, or a church?

True story here about a guy by the name of David Berdish that worked for Ford Motor Company. His role was to make a change in the Visteon Automotive Systems which was Ford's parts manufacturing company. He was able to turn around the division from a \$50 million loss to a \$175 million profit. And how did he do that? Well, it took 5 years, and he did not do it alone.

Berdish, first had to get the engineers, accountants, union workers and non-union works to stop flinging accusations at each other and start to look at the problems so that they could be solved. He had to create a level of trust among these workers. He had to get them all to stop worrying about what the other guy was doing and concentrate on what they were able to do. Berdish was able to get the employees to trust one another. Boy wouldn't that be a good scenario for our government today????

Trust takes time and is usually difficult in a diverse situation. None of us live in a vacuum, so we must learn to get along. I think that the church is a unique place where trust is easier to come by than in a school, business, or certainly government entity. A church is a place where we come for fellowship to enhance our faith and to be in mission with others who share a common set of values. We even have coffee hours, and potluck meals to get to know each other better. We share our faith, how we see life, and where we see God working in our lives. Even our annual meeting today is another opportunity to gather, other than in worship. So, I do hope you will all stay for our meeting today as it is a culmination of all we have done together as Christ the Servant Lutheran Church. It is also your opportunity to give your opinion on where we should go from here, what your vision is for our congregation.

It is a fact that our society is rapidly changing. Even here in Park Falls, it is becoming more diverse. A favorite Dr at the clinic is from Uganda, 15 Hispanic men were transported here to work at a local sawmill, a favorite restaurant in town is run by a Chinese family. What is Park Falls coming too? It is becoming more diverse as each new person comes to live among us. And with new people in our society, we must embrace their cultures and customs that might be a bit foreign to us. This challenges us to come out of our safe little vacuum groups. We miss so much if we don't include others, even those different than ourselves, because each new person, not to mention each new

culture, is filled with people who have gifts, talents, and wisdom of their own to offer.

Here at Christ the Servant, it pains me when folks leave our folds. I remember when the Johnsons left. Diane was not only our church secretary, but also choir director. How will we replace her? When Ev and Sue moved, they left a definite void in our musical prowess. It is painful when the people leave our congregation. When Ralph and Vickie moved away, there was a definite emptiness left in our Bible study reference ability. But folks, I think that sitting right here in the pews today are all the gifts we need.

Our challenge, and mine as well, is not just to bring in new people with new gifts and abilities, but we must embolden them to use their God given gifts. No matter how different these gifts may appear, we need to allow space for people to use and contribute what they bring to our midst. This congregation will continue to thrive as long as we believe that everyone counts and is important. Our loving God believes it so. Verse 18 says, "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." You see, God chose you to be here at Christ the Servant, in His church. So, let His will be done. **AMEN**