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**Title:** #beCHURCH: be Connected

**Preaching:** Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

**Text:** [1 Corinthians 12:12-20](#)

**E-mail:** [Ryan Hazen](#)

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This is the second sermon of four in a series we've called - #beChurch. In this series, Pastor Danny and I are exploring what it means to BE CHURCH. What does God want from us when we come together as the body of Christ? We're using scripture as our guide over these weeks to answer that question. Last week, we examined the

importance of worship. In my sermon last week, I suggested that worship should have three movements to it – UPWARD in awe of God's power – INWARD in self-examination and prayer – and OUTWARD as we are empowered to be Christ's hands and feet in the world.

Today we'll take a look at how it's important to CONNECT with one another in order for us to BE CHURCH more completely. The 2012 Marvel movie, *The Avengers*, can be a good example. {AVENGER PICTURE} That movie is the story of a group of superheroes that banded together to battle an evil force that was bent on world domination. The only problem was, these superheroes had a hard time banding together. For about the first half of the movie, they were each caught up in their own agendas. They squabbled with each other. There was backbiting. They distrusted each other's motives.

As a result, the whole was far less than the sum of its parts. And the bad guy was smart enough to anticipate all of this. He actually counted on their lack of unity in order to accomplish his diabolical plan. He almost won, because the Avengers failed to realize that it took all of them, each using his or her own gifts, in order to achieve their goal.

At one point, when it looks as though the team has fallen apart, Agent Nick Fury says to them, "The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people, see if they could become something more together than they are individually - see if they could work together when we needed them to achieve great things." <sup>1</sup>

Nick Fury's statement could describe God's plan for the church. Unfortunately, the first half of The Avengers pretty much describes the way it sometimes works out for churches. It certainly describes the way the church was functioning (or malfunctioning) in Corinth when Paul wrote to them. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul gives a "Nick Fury" speech of his own.

We know that the church in Corinth had been fussing with each other about which one of them was greater – who had better gifts for ministry than the other. Paul had had enough of their bickering and steps in. In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, Paul begins to use an analogy that will help them and us understand how the church is really supposed to function. He puts before them a visual of a human body and draws lessons from it all through the rest of the chapter. He compares the physical body to the Body of Christ.

It is more than a mere figure of speech to say that the church is the Body of Christ. That is where Paul begins. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12)

Paul is saying that we are a part of Christ. We constitute the means by which Christ functions in the world. It is important that you have that concept clearly in mind if you want to understand how the church works. It is a body with many members, and yet it is only one body. It is not many bodies, it is not many denominations. As followers of Christ, we are equal partners in this body.

Now Paul answers the question, "How did we get into that body?" His answer is clear, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." When we baptize someone, they are NOT being baptized into Geist Christian Church or the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They are being baptized into the body of Christ. This afternoon, we begin Pastors Class with 26 students learning what it means to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and they hopefully will make the decision for themselves to be baptized sometime in November. Last Saturday, we baptized six students into the body of Christ.

Did they become a hand? Some, yes - some, no. Did they become a foot? Some, yes – some, no. Did they become an ear? Some, yes – some, no. However they will use their gifts for God, each one is equally as important to the body of Christ as the other. In baptism we experience the Spirit of God at work to overcome the divisions on which the powers of this world depend. The Corinthians had been competing with one another according to what their culture said was important. They were using the gifts of the Holy Spirit, meant for the good of the whole community, as their personal arsenal in the competition for honor at the expense of others. Paul will have none of it. By

pointing to the church's common experience of God's grace in baptism, Paul makes clear that we all share the same water, the same promise, the same Spirit, and thus all are equally part of the same body.

Arguments over who has the better spiritual gifts does not happen in most churches I know. But our culture does polarize us in other ways. In verse 13, Paul gives two examples of how the culture divided people then – "Jews or Greeks, slaves or free." Today we would say, Black or white, Asian or Hispanic; straight or gay, single or married; citizen or undocumented; rich or poor; young or old. This is what divides us in our day but shouldn't because "in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – all made to drink of one Spirit." <sup>2</sup>

In the Gospel of John, Jesus put the relationship into a very concise, neat formula, "You in me, and I in you," (John 14:20). That is what you find fulfilled here with the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ he puts us into Christ, "you in me." He joins our life with his; he becomes our source of existence and strength; we are part of him. Then the Spirit comes into us and we find the fulfillment of the words of Jesus, "I in you." That is the power by which we are to live. It is this dual ministry of being "in Christ" and he "in us," that constitutes the mystery and the marvel of the church.

But how do we do that? We have to be in relationship with each other. We have to know each other. I want to confess to you how sad I am when I go to a funeral and learn something about the deceased which amazes me and wish I would have had the opportunity to talk to them about that part of their life. The last two deaths in our congregation were incredible women – one was a teacher who was a finalist to go on the space shuttle Challenger. I didn't know that. The other, a pioneer who led the way for women in engineering, especially the aviation industry. I didn't know that. Since I've been thinking about this a lot this week, on Friday, I restarted the Bible study that I lead with the question, "what is one thing that I will learn about you at your funeral that I will regret not knowing before?"

We need to know each other's story. To be disciples of Jesus Christ, we need to be connected to each other. That happens in groups smaller than this one. If you are not a part of a small group, I hope you'll consider seeking one out. We just published a listing of happenings over the next couple of months. Pick up one at the information desk. If you have no idea where to start, send an email saying that to [connect@geistchristian.org](mailto:connect@geistchristian.org). Being a part of a group - whether it is a study group, or a music group or a prayer group, or a service group, or a fellowship group - will allow you to connect with

people you didn't know before. It will allow you to learn something that you didn't know before. You'll discover that we're not all the same but we all have gifts.

Paul says that if your foot should say, "Well I can't do all the things a hand does. It's so flexible. It is hooked onto that long arm, and it is used all the time. I can't wiggle my toes like the hand can wiggle the fingers; I just can't do what the hand can do, therefore I really don't belong in this body," it would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? That does not make the foot any less a part of the body. The foot is deceiving itself. It is part of the body. Paul is saying that if you think of yourself as a member of the church, the Body of Christ, and you say to yourself, "Well, because I can't stand up and preach or teach a class, there is really nothing I can do in the Body of Christ," you are deceiving yourself. You have shut your eyes to truth. You need to open them to see the part God has given you.

The work of the church is to heal the broken-hearted, to give deliverance to the captives, to open the eyes of the blind, and to preach the good news to the poor and despairing of heart. That is what the Body of Christ has come into the world to do -- to encourage, strengthen and help people. That is what the work of the church is. It happens in here so we can make it happen out there. Being one body – being connected in here - is part of the training program so we can be out there. That's next week - serving. If you have that in mind, then there is definitely a part for every member, without exception.

That's how our physical body works. There is a unity to its members; but the variety of parts is necessary for the whole. The parts are interdependent—so that each one needs the other. There is nurturing care that the parts give to each other. And in all of it, there is a mutuality in the way that all the parts share together in either the suffering or the honor of just one part.

The Beatles are arguably the most influential rock and roll band in history. But, their career really only spanned about eight years from 1962-1970 and if you don't start the clock until the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964, it's really only six years. In 1970, the conflicts between them became too much for any of them to put up with any longer, and they broke up. One theory of the short on-stage longevity of the group is that they all had the same gifts. All four of them sang. All of them wrote songs. Three out of four of them played guitar. As talented as they were, there wasn't a lot of diversity between them. <sup>3</sup>

Compare them to a group like U2. No one has ever sung on a U2 record except for Bono. No one has played lead guitar except the Edge. They started in 1976 and were only stopped touring in 2020 because of the

pandemic but just dropped U2 Live at the Apollo last month. It's a stretch that's now in its 45<sup>th</sup> year. Obviously, there are lots of reasons, but I believe one is because each member has and uses their specific and different gifts. These same dynamics are how our church family is to work. Let's appreciate and use one another's gifts in our quest to BE CHURCH.

Back to the Avengers. If you've not seen The Avengers, then I don't want to spoil anything for you. But I will tell you that what finally brought this group of dysfunctional heroes together was the death of one of the characters. Somebody gave his life for the sake of the group, and this is what brought them together.

At the end of the day, the one thing makes a church more than just a bunch of talented people is the death and resurrection of Christ. Everything we do points to the sacrifice Christ made for us, and his resurrection. Without that, we could still be a group of talented people. But because of Jesus Christ, and the power of Christ that works within us, we are gifted people, connected into one body, for one purpose.

I want to give you permission this week, this month, to make deeper connections. You don't have to ask something as morbid as what you'd learn from a person's funeral. How about this – your price for a Geist Christian Church cup of coffee today is to find out something about someone that you didn't know. It can be someone new or someone you've known forever. If the person looks to be about my age or older, ask them what they were doing when they were 35? If you're talking to a young person asked them about their favorite teacher or what they learned in kindergarten.

Because we are one body, connect with one another so that we are better equipped to BE CHURCH!

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<sup>1</sup> Idea for The Avengers as an illustration from sermon by James Jackson, January 1, 2014 called "Body Building." Found at [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary help for this sermon from article by Brian Peterson, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a" published January 24, 2016 at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org).

<sup>3</sup> Beatles / U2 comparison from same sermon listed above.