

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 23, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Isaiah 51:1-6; 2nd Reading: Matthew 16:13-20
Scripture for Message: Romans 12:1-8 “Body of Christ”

“Discern what is acceptable and good, according to God’s will.” We who are many are one body in Christ – all together the entire body of Christ with one purpose, to further God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is for God’s glory and not our own. We all have gifts, gifts bestowed on us by the grace of God not given so that we become entitled or feel superior, but so, as individuals within the body of Christ, our actions have practical consequences in the day-to-day life of the church.

Paul, in this letter to the churches in Rome, addresses how he believes we should function as the body of Christ. Paul spent the first part of this letter outlining God’s actions in our lives and he writes of God’s trustworthiness and faithfulness. He writes, “I appeal to you therefore” that as a response to all he has illustrated in this letter, we should present ourselves as a living sacrifice, “holy and acceptable to God.”

We do this not by conforming to the things of this world but by living as if we are part of God’s kingdom. We do this by letting our minds be transformed so we can begin to understand what God’s good and perfect will is. “Conforming to the world means conforming to the message that greed and acquisition, money and wealth, power and position lead to ultimate happiness.”¹ Like Peter sinking in the stormy sea, when we take our eyes off Jesus by looking to things of this world, our faith can start to falter.

Paul reminds us how to live as a community of faith and how to actively respond to God’s gift of grace and mercy. He tells us that all followers of Christ have a part in the body of Christ. Our gifts differ and the path to God’s purpose might look different for each of us, but the end result should be the same – the path of all believers leads to eternity. Because of that truth, each of us should accept our gifts with “sober judgment” meaning, I believe, that we must take our responsibilities seriously and refuse to impose the standard of our own relationship with God onto others – each according to how God measures faith.

So, we are one body in Christ. When all parts function together, the body works the way it should. No one person, entity, or committee should

¹ Mindy Douglas. “Romans 12:1-8 – Connecting the Reading with the World” *Connections: Year A, Vol. 3*. eds: Green, et. al. WJK. 2020. Print. pp. 256-257.

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shoulder the burden for the whole. In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we believe in the union of all Christians; one body, one faith, one God – that all may be one. Unity is one of our guiding principles. One can say that Paul's description of the "body of Christ" in this scripture from Romans is how the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is structured.

This unity of the body of Christ stresses diversity and inclusion – words that have lost favor in recent years but are necessary when thinking about the church. Paul Achtemeier, in his interpretation of Romans, writes, "That analogy of the body not only allows for, but even emphasizes the necessity of diversity, a diversity based on the multifaceted abundance of God's grace itself."² This diversity and inclusion is necessary for the body of Christ to function as it should – not all of God's followers have the same gifts but all gifts have equal importance to be used for the glory of God. Paul Achtemeier reminds us that there are no gifts of God the Christian community can afford to ignore.

Paul, in this letter to the Romans, writes about the individual's responsibility to use their gifts according to the grace given to us. We can imagine that what he highlights in this section of his letter are functions essential to church operations, functions that cannot be ignored. I guess the message in this scripture, for this church, is that if we want a thriving community of faith – each member must use their gift for the glory of God. There is no lack of responsibility since each has a particular gift – every single Christian has received God's grace.

Paul writes to churches in turmoil, churches that are traveling a new and un-chartered path to God's kingdom. We, on the other hand, follow a path that has been traveled for thousands of years by a diverse company of saints. We can look to our ancestors for direction or as our reading from Isaiah describes, "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." We have examples for living as a community of faith, people who have gone before us to lead the way, and within each example are individuals using their gifts to sustain the community of believers.

In our country and around the world churches are going through periods of discernment – asking the question "how do we faithfully follow Christ through turmoil and chaos?" The words we read this morning from the book of Isaiah and from Psalms give us guidance and assurance. From

² Paul J. Achtemeier. *Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Romans*. WJK. 2010. Print. p.196

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Psalm 138 – “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.” The steadfast love of God endures forever – “Do not forsake the work of your hands.” All of Jesus’ followers have a part in the work of the kin-dom of God since all have received the gift of God’s grace.

I believe the message from Paul to the Romans applies to more than just using your talents because there is more work to be done in God’s kin-dom than what “talents” can achieve. Some of us will respond that they don’t have time or energy to do anything more for God. I see that, energy is low even in my own life. I know however that we worship a God that creates possibilities, God is doing a new thing in our world and God calls us to participate in that new thing. Interestingly enough, that does not mean that we have to leave our traditions behind, but we must be authentic in our worship – we must be who we say we are. That means we must be serious in what we do for God through the church, the body of Christ.

The bottom line is that because grace is given to each of us through Jesus Christ, the gifts we receive through grace must be used for the glory of God. Each believer – church member – must allow God to renew and transform their minds to understand, recognize, and use their gifts for the glory of God. Look to scriptures for the energy and strength needed to continue as part of the body of Christ – “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” At the risk of being repetitive, every single Christian has received the gift of God’s grace, and the church cannot survive if we choose to ignore our gifts.