Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Bart Roush
October 25, 2026
1 Corinthians 12

Let us pray for inspiration from and an awareness of God's Spirit.

Holy Spirit, breathe upon us as we hear Scripture. Fill us with your presence, wisdom, and peace, so that we may be transformed by your truth. Help us to hear your Word and live it out faithfully. Let your truth take root and bear fruit in our daily lives. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church and it describes the metaphor of the Body of Christ. In this metaphor for the church, Paul discusses the nature of spiritual gifts and that the gifts are spread throughout the members of the church, but all come from the Spirit of God. He then discusses the importance and necessity for each member within the Body of Christ and how we are interconnected. He then closes this section of his letter encouraging the members to strive for gifts that edify, encourage and build up one another as a precursor to the next chapter which eloquently speaks on the importance of love.

Listen for a word from God.

> **12**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not
> want you to be ignorant. **2**You know that when you were gentiles
> you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.
> **3**Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the
> Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say
> "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

[4]Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, [5]and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, [6]and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. [7]To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8]To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9]to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10]to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11]All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

[12]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. [13]For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

[14]Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15]If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16]And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [17]If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? [18]But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [19]If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20]As it is, there are many members yet one body. [21]The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

[22]On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker
are indispensable, [23]and those members of the body that we think
less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less
respectable members are treated with greater respect, [24]whereas
our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so
arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,
[25]that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members
may have the same care for one another. [26]If one member suffers,
all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice
together with it.

[27]Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
[28]And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second
prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing,
forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.
[29]Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work
powerful deeds? [30]Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in
tongues? Do all interpret? [31] But strive for the greater gifts. And I
will show you a still more excellent way.

About 15 years ago, I completed my Doctor of Ministry degree in Congregational Mission and Leadership. The final part of the program required me to research and write a thesis and successfully defend the thesis. For my thesis, I examined four Presbyterian congregations spread throughout the United States and specifically looked at their new member incorporation processes. These were congregations that were taking the new member process seriously as an intentional time of discipleship. All of them had a higher number of adult baptisms than most Presbyterian congregations, which I inferred was an indication that something was different, and I was curious to learn about their practices and the theology that supported their process. All of the congregations were very mission-minded, paid particular attention to building

community, and framed some part of their new member process around baptismal identity and what it meant to be claimed by God in baptism. They also all spoke at some point about the church as the Body of Christ.

One of the conclusions, however, that I came to in my research was wondering if the term member was still useful. While the metaphor of the Body of Christ is based in scripture, I was concerned that this metaphor of being a member of the Body of Christ was not, and still is not, the first thing that comes to mind when people hear the word "member." I think the word "member" has been culturally conditioned and carries a stronger institutional connotation than the scriptural understanding.

Many of us remember the American Express commercial that depicted the well-off person able to buy anything they wanted if the had the American Express credit card. The commercial always ended with the tag, "membership has its privileges."

And, of course, many of us had memberships in a most exclusive club, Blockbuster video, where your blue and yellow membership card would allow you to rent the latest and greatest movies on video.

There was also the clothing line and label called, "Members only." In the mid to late 1980's it was all the rage in some circles to have their racer jacket. Their advertising tagline was "when you put it on, something happens".

This understanding of membership, with its benefits and privileges, was part of a larger cultural shift in the early and mid 1980's from what a communications scholar interpreted as a broader cultural shift from participatory communities to increasingly wealthy materially-based communities represented in the purchase of consumer products.[i]

Membership, in this understanding, was about organizational association, consuming goods and services, and having your desires met and being catered to. This mindset also began to shift into church culture with the rise of nondenominational mega churches. The most cynical critique of this movement in large mega churches was that they were places tailored to mimic the broader culture and people came to consume religious goods and services. As these churches became more popular, and as the shift from participatory community to a more consumer-minded community, these ideas also began to permeate the mainline church and its understanding of membership.

This more functional understanding of the church became based in the understanding of church as an affiliation of volunteers in a social organization where members receive various rights, benefits, and privileges. In this view, membership in the church has become like any other membership in a social service organization and no longer is about forming people to a particular way of life. This shift has made some, myself included, wonder if using the term "disciple" or "follower" might be more descriptive and helpful than the term "member."

My hope is that the term "member" might still be recovered with a missional and biblical understanding in the metaphor of the Body of Christ. Where instead of a primarily organizational or institutional understanding, people might think of membership in a more incarnational and covenantal understanding. Where people become part of a community called together by God, to be nurtured and encouraged to then be sent out into the world to participate in God's mission. If we are to think about ourselves and our church in this way, then, I think it has several implications.

First, it is to recognize that there is both a unity and diversity within the church, the Body of Christ. The word "varieties" and the word "same" are mentioned several times in this passage. Paul says there are varieties of gifts and varieties of service. There are varieties of activities in the body of Christ. And Paul also says there is the same Lord, same Spirit, and same God that animate all of the varieties of gifts, service, and activities. The uniqueness of the body of Christ is that this diversity and unity exist together and it is by design. God has made each of us individually and given us gifts that are unique to us and has also called us together in community to be stronger together.

The second implication about being the body of Christ is that we should honor the diversity that God has made. None of us are more important than another. There are no levels of membership in the body of Christ. There is no distinction of who has the green card, or the gold card, or the platinum card. There is no premium or elite benefits for the top tier only. We are all necessary and important. In fact, scripture tells us that we should do our best to honor those that are in the lowest position, that all should be lifted up because if one of us suffers, we all suffer. A foundational truth of the body of Christ is that we need one another.

Another attribute of the body of Christ is that we exist for the benefit of the greater good. You have heard me say this over the last few weeks. That to be fully the body of Christ means that our care and concern extends outwardly and cannot be contained just within the interior community of the local congregation – we must move out and participate in the mission of God in the world. God is incarnational – that is, God shows up in the world in the form of Jesus – but God is also incarnational in the Body of Christ. God shows up in the world, through us.

Over the past few weeks, you have heard from several folks as we have been talking about our financial stewardship of this community. But hopefully, you have heard more than just people talk about money. I hope you have also heard about the love and support that people have gotten in communities of faith like Oak Grove, that you have heard about what it means to be the Body of Christ and why it is important that we are the church sent out into the world.

We have also talked these last few weeks about what it means to serve together, worship and pray together, care for one another and the world together. I believe Oak Grove is a community that help cultivate compassion and empathy. A community where we get to express our fears, our disappointments, our concerns. Where we get to raise our voices against injustice and hope and pray for a better world. But not only hope and pray but actively engage our faith and work toward justice. A community where we cry with one another, comfort one another, laugh with one another, serve with one another, and worship with one another. The testimonies that you have heard these last few weeks are about the importance of this community, this Body of Christ.

I believe God is at work in the world through the church, through the Body of Christ. Even when the world seems overwhelming, in the face of all of these things, God is there, and God is for us. God does not do this alone. We are called to join God in helping make the world good. In a natural disaster, look for the helpers. In times of war, look to those working for peace. In times of distress, look for those that comfort. Look for those that provide the means of flourishing, look for those marching and organizing for a better way, look for those who in the face of insurmountable challenges still believe there is a better way. Our faith requires activity in the world. We do not have a passive God or a passive faith. We have a faith that is dedicated to active participation in the world to make it better.

In a few moments, we will dedicate our pledges for the next year. For those of you who have pledged, or are about to pledge, I want to thank you. Not just for the monetary commitment that you are making, but also for the commitment to be the body of Christ. I believe the church, and specifically churches like Oak Grove, are needed now more than ever.

I am glad that I am a part of a community that gets to live out its life together. I am proud to serve and give to a church like Oak Grove. Kelly and I tithe, that is, give 10 percent of our income to Oak Grove, because we are grateful to God, and we are grateful that we have this particular caring, compassionate, faith community. I am so very thankful for Oak Grove, a church that has a vision for what church and the world should be. I am glad that I am part of a community that takes God's call seriously. That we are a joyful, inclusive, compassionate community of faith seeking to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. I believe in the purpose and ministry of Oak Grove.

Because we belong to God, and to one another, we give to God that which is God, namely ourselves. We take this sacred covenant between us and God, and we give our lives back to God; in our worship and our work.

Oak Grove is a place where all can belong to the people of God, the body of Christ. Here, we share in a communal life with the people of God as representative of God's body in the world. We are a living and breathing body called together and claimed by God. Thanks be to God!

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1. [i]Kelshaw, Todd (2015) "Wearing Members Only jackets: Baby boomers and the shift from sharing in to buying into community", in *Baby Boomers and Popular Culture: An Inquiry into America's Most Powerful*.