

I am delighted to be with you. If you do not know me, my name is Chris Lemmon. I am a pastor in the EPC. My wife, Tanya, and our three kids, Christopher, Joshua & Abigail attend here at Colonial, Overland Park.

We are so grateful for this church.

At the end of 2021, the LORD led us to leave our call at a small rural church in Northwest Iowa and move our family to Kansas City, KS.

And the LORD led us to come here to Colonial in December 2021. The Christmas Eve service was our first service at the SKC campus.

We got a chance to meet with Pastor Jim, shortly after moving here. We immediately knew we had found the place God was leading our family to worship for the next season of life.

Jim invited me to ride with him to the presbytery meeting in Withita. Over the two days we got to chat and had some great discussion about unity and diversity in the church. He invited me to share some of my own experience and preach on that today.

If you are able, please stand with us as we read God's Word.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. **14** Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. **19** If they were all one part, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" **22** On the contrary, those parts of the

body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, **24** while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, **25** so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. **26** If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Prayer

I. With Christ

II. The Unity of the Body of Christ

III. The Diversity of the Body of Christ

IV. We are needed, and We need Each Other

I. With Christ – 1 Cor. 12:12 - end

“So it is with Christ” –

This little phrase reminds us as Christians of our union with Christ.

It includes our adoption as God’s children.

It reminds us that we are washed from our guilt and sin and made

perfect in God’s sight. “So it is with Christ.”

All of this comes through the gift of the gospel, it all comes in a context of grace. God gives us the Holy Spirit who brings this fruit to expression in our life.

When we start applying the gospel to a new area of life, we see our own sinfulness more clearly. We often feel unable to do what God calls us to do.

We cry out, **“I need you LORD to bring about this fruit in my life, because I don’t have the power to do it.”**

Jack Miller, founder of the mission agency Serge, says this:

“Cheer up! You’re a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you’re more loved than you ever dared hope!”

When we study God’s Word, we discover more things that God needs to change in us AND we also see how deeply loved we are by God.

II. The Unity of the Body of Christ

The idea of the body was a common way people talked about everyone having different roles and working together as a group in that culture.

Ancient writers used the metaphor of the body. What is different with what

Paul is saying is that the **redemptive work of Jesus Christ**, and **Jesus’ death and resurrection** is at the center of what Paul is talking about.¹

What does this teach us?

¹ 459 pg. Collins F. Raymond. Sacra Pagina The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999.

When we are born again we become part of the family of God. That family functions like a body with many parts that all belong to one body. The unity is really emphasized here:

12: v12

“Just as a body, though one, (1st) has many parts, but all its many parts form one (2nd) body, so it is with Christ.”

12:v13

“For in one (3rd) Spirit we were baptized into one (4th) body— Jew or Greek, slaves or free— and all were made to to drink of one (5th) Spirit.”

We both belong to God, because we both belong to God, we belong to each other.

Illustration

I am going to give you an illustration of how I experienced this.

In my first call out of seminary, I worked as a leader in small church plant in Kansas City KS.

In this church plant we had a number Nepali refugees. All of them who were 30 or older were first generation Christians. Many of them were converts from Hinduism, and they were 1st or 2nd generation Christians.

One couple I got to know included Karna, Pavitra, and Samuel, their son. They rode the van to church. I helped with that ministry, that's how I got to know them. Pavitra was a prayer warrior. She spoke only a little English. Their apartment was at the last stop on the route. As I got to know them, they would often invite me to eat a meal with them, as I dropped them off. The first few times I told them I did not have time. But after they asked me several times, I said yes. Pavitra got the pork from the refrigerator, peppers, and spices, and started making food for me. The kitchen is filling up with all these smells of spices. On this day, she opened the backdoor because the spell was really strong. I am sitting here and at the time I was not married. Pavitra asks through her son, "Chris, why aren't you married? Why don't you have a wife?"

I gave them the good Christian answer, "I guess God has not brought the right woman into my life for me to marry."

They took that answer in. Pavitra said something to Samuel. He translates. "We are going to pray God brings you a wife." My response was pretty neutral. "Okay great." Pavitra said something to Samuel. He translated, "We are also going to pray that God gives your future wife and gives you children."

But what was going on inside me was, I was 32 at the time, I had wanted to be married for 10 years. I was to the point that I did not want to pray about getting married any more. I don't know if any of you have ever had anything in your life where you have prayed a lot, and that prayer has not been answered the way you want it answered, and so you sort of stop praying.

In less than six months from that conversation, Tanya and I connected and began to develop a relationship, within a year of dating we got married. 10 months after we got married, our son Christopher was born. I had wanted to be married for 10 years. But waited until I met these Christians friends, and he orchestrated their prayers to be the prelude to him bringing my wife into my life and giving me my first son.

After Christopher was born, I brought him back to that same apartment, I placed my son, Christopher, in Pavitra lap and I asked her to pray over him, that he would grow up to walk with the LORD and serve Jesus in his life. I could not understand what was said as they prayed over him. But I know they have the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. The same Holy Spirit that is in me and that I want my son to be filled with. We had the most important things in common.

Application

God waited until I connected with this family and experienced the unity of Christ with them before he answered my prayer. They were from a different culture, they spoke a different language, and at the same time we worshiped the LORD together, we shared a meal together. We had the same Holy Spirit living in us. When this family prayed over my son Christopher, I felt this deep sense of unity in Christ with them.

III. The Diversity in the Body of Christ

Paul highlights the diversity of the body of Christ. In verse 12:13 & 14.

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jew or Greek, slaves or free.” 1 Corinthians 12:13-14

Ethnic Diversity

Within this one church, in the first century, there were **Jews** and **Greeks**, these are different ethnic groups.

Economic Diversity - The Corinthian church had slaves among its members. Slaves were some of the poorest people in that city. The Corinthian church also had free people, which included middle income all the way up to wealthy.

The culture we live in today, it is possible ***for some of us*** to choose a church that is mostly people that look and live a lot like us, same ethnicity, same economic status. That option did not exist in the first century. The

church was a small but growing group of people. If you got saved you just worship with that group of people in your city, slave, free, Jew, Greek.

Image of God

To dive deeper here and grasp the early churches appreciation for diversity we need to reflect on how the idea of the image of God impacted the early church.

Early Christianity is counter cultural because it taught that the image of God was equally and fully found in each person. The image of God in us is damaged by sin, but that image is being repair in Christians as they are born again and grow spiritually.

Illustration

The image of God is crucial for understanding how we relate to God and to one another.

In the 20th century theologian Herman Bavinck wrote this about the image of God: ***The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members*** The Beautiful Community. By Irwin Ince, Quoting Reformed Dogmatics by Herman Bavink.

In his book The Beautiful Community, Rev. Irwin Ince, gives this definition of the image of God and then adds how that relates to diversity, ***“I would expand Bavinck’s words to say that the Image of God is much too rich for it to be realized in a single race, ethnic group, or culture.”***

Here is another way to unpack this. If you only experience the Christian community in one ethnic group or with one economic level of people, you are not able to fully taste and experience the depth, width, and glory of God. God is so full and so amazing it takes all the variety of people he has created for us to fully experience His image and glory.

Illustration

In 2015 when my son, Christopher was born in St. Louis, Tanya and I joined a small group that was part of our church. We would eat together, pray, and study the Bible each week. It was at this group that we met a new friend, Mrs. Anna Young. Mrs. Anna was an African American woman and about the age of my mother. She grew up in St. Louis her whole life. How we got to be friends is was that I led a ministry with college students. I would bring college student to volunteer at her house. Mrs. Anna had been at the church that we worked at for around 10 years. She sometimes needed help with physical things around her house. We helped clean out her gutters on a Saturday. We helped weed her flowers with groups of students. She would sit outside with us on these workdays and share her testimony with us and the students. She would encourage the college students to commit to follow the LORD.

She had business making cakes and selling them. She would bless us sometimes with one of her cakes. As I got to spend more time with Mrs. Anna visiting her, I got to hear about her experience of growing up during the Civil Right Movement. I learned about some of her personal experiences with how she was treated as an African American woman. I learned about her musical preferences. I learned about what recipes she liked to make. I learned about Gospel style music and the music of the Black church. But she also always reminded me that she liked hearing music from many cultures including mine. She enjoyed the French worship music and the Spanish worship music which we would sing at church. Because Mrs. Anna was different from me, I learned about a lot of things from her.

Then when Christopher was born, Tanya, got postpartum depression and had to be hospitalized. When Tanya came home, Mrs. Anna volunteered to watch Christopher and give Tanya a chance to get some extra sleep. She was a friend to us. After that experience she took an interest in Christopher and treated him like her own grandson. She made him a birthday cake for him each year and came to his birthday party. She referred to us as her spiritual family in the LORD. We referred to her as part of our family. When God moved us away from St. Louis to a small rural

church in Iowa we talked on the phone and would facetime with the kids. She prayed for us and encouraged us. When we talked we always talked about Jesus and the bond of unity that comes through the gospel.

Picture.

Unfortunately, earlier this year, she went home to be with the LORD. Mrs. Anna was a mentor and friend I could lean on. If things were not going well at the church or I was having a bad day, I could call her up and she would speak the gospel to me and encourage me.

She spent many years of her life active in the Black Church. But when I met her she talked about loving people from any culture who also are following Jesus. She explained and taught me many things about the African American experience. She also chose to spend the final season of her walk with God at a church with African Americans, Caucasian-American, African immigrants, and immigrants from all over the world. She showed me what it looked like to embrace someone as a brother or sister in the LORD who was from a different culture from me.

Listening to her testimony and watching her example are some of my fondest memories.

Application

When it comes to walking in unity and embracing the beautiful diversity of God's family. I am still learning. I don't have all the answers. But there is something I see Jesus do often throughout the gospels that helps. Jesus shared many meals with people. If you go through the gospels and count how many meals Jesus had with people, it's a lot. When you **open up your home** or **when someone opens their home to you**, and you take that step to connect with them over a meal, God can really use that. My sister in the LORD, Mrs. Anna, shared her recipes, and special dishes she had been perfecting for years. She invited us into her home. That led to many good conversations about our kids, our lives, and about Jesus.

So you might ask the LORD, is there anyone you want me to invite into my home so that I can learn more about them and hear their testimony.

When we take that step we can see and experience the image of God in another person.

IV. We are needed, and We need Each Other

I want to leave you with two thoughts. The first one is this:

Your brothers and sisters in the LORD need you. You have unique experiences and things about you that this church family needs. You are needed.

You are needed, just as a body needs, its eyes, its ears, its hands, and its feet, you are needed in this church body. v.15

The second thought is this, we all need the diverse, multicultural, multigifted, unique body of Christ. When I stepped into the relationships in both of the stories I shared, I was thinking, "I am here to help and that's what God is calling me to do." This family needs a ride to church, I wanted to help them. But what came later was I realized how much I needed them in my life. God used them to grow my faith and answer my prayer to have a family. When I initially met Mrs. Anna, she needed help cleaning out gutters, and fixing little things around her house. But I also needed her just as much in different ways. I needed help with my baby son. I needed her wisdom, her encouragement, and her faith in the LORD. I needed to be around her to learn from her.

We each need brothers and sisters in the LORD that are different from us. When we see our deep need for one another, and God's image in them, God can lead us to walk as His diverse family that is deeply connected in unity by the gospel. Prayer - Work this in us Holy Spirit.

