Holy Ghost for All

Joel 2:28-29 — “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 — “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 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. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

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. 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. 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? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

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!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 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, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

Acts 2:1-12 — “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?”
Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

The most important thing we can do is to personally surrender our lives to God. Once we surrender to the Savior, we must then flesh out our faith in fellowship with others. We see that in Romans 12:4-5: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

In Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, Paul makes over 30 references to the church by using the analogy of a human body. Just as our bodies need care and attention, so too, the church can only be healthy and experience growth when everything is brought into balance and properly exercised.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to get out of balance in your life? The same is true for the church. We must guard against overemphasizing one aspect of ministry at the exclusion of the others.

This morning we are going to give our attention to the 8th Holy Ghost topic, “HG for All”. If we are truly one with our Lord, and are Holy Ghost-minded, then desiring salvation for all people and caring for one another, becomes our focus.

When you came in this morning you were handed a puzzle piece as a reminder that you are a valuable part of God’s picture for this church. I’d like to suggest that one of the reasons some of us might not be caring for others like we should is because we might feel disconnected from the community of believers at Richland. True caring flows out of connectedness, and when we care we become more connected. We’re in this together. Did you know that every snapshot of the church in the New Testament is a group picture?
The Apostle Paul stayed in Corinth eighteen months working through the many problems that divided the Corinthian church. It’s here that we pick up the New Testament story for the morning. Paul tells the people of Corinth that it’s time to get into spiritual shape by doing some body building. His basic point is that we are all linked together as pieces of a puzzle. And as such, our linkage means that we are bound to “live life together” and to care for one another.

Each piece is part of a united whole, but is not uniform. We see this in verse 14: “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.” Just as our human bodies are one unit made up of many individual ingredients, so too, the body of Christ is an entity with a multitude of pieces.

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In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy is demanding that Linus change the channel on the TV and threatens him with her fist if he won’t do it. Linus isn’t too frightened by this threat and says, “What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?” With a scowl on her face, Lucy replies, “These five fingers. Individually they’re nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold!” It’s at this point that Linus decides to acquiesce. He asks Lucy, “Which channel do you want?” As he’s walking toward the TV, he looks at his fingers and says, “Why can’t you guys get organized like that?”

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While I’m certainly not condoning Lucy’s methods, this is a great illustration of how the church is to work together. Individually we’re weak, but when we’re curled into a single unit, we form a Spiritual weapon that is amazing to behold. It’s only when our many pieces come together that we can demonstrate a picture of God’s power.

Each and every person who makes up the body, is important. In verses 15-17, Paul is addressing those of us who may feel inferior: “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the
body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.” A foot may feel less important than a hand and an ear may feel mediocre compared to an eye. Paul is establishing the truth that all are valuable and necessary.

The smaller pieces in God’s puzzle, called the church, are just as important as the more visible ones. No one is inferior. Everyone is indispensable. This church will never become what Christ wants it to be, if all of us do not do our part, together.

Each part of this puzzle called the church, is divinely made. Most people don’t grasp this simple truth. When we do, we will experience freedom and joy like we’ve never had before. God made you just the way He wanted you! You have been designed to reflect His purposes! He has shaped you for spiritual significance! Your piece has a place right here in this church! Look at verse18: “But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” You are not an accident because you are part of God’s awesome arrangement called the Body of Christ. God has already determined who is going to be what part and where that part is going to plug into the church. And we can’t rearrange that.

Notice that this verse says, “Every one of them.” No matter how you feel this morning, you are not exempt from God’s glory in the church. You are not disqualified because of something you’ve done or how inadequate you may feel. Because you have been designed on purpose, you have a purpose, and that purpose is to find your place that is shaped exactly like your piece of the puzzle. Once you discover your place, then it’s time to plug into the greatest adventure of all time.

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, “just as He wanted them to be.” The word “wanted” means, “to delight in.” Have you ever thought about that? God has placed you in the church for His delight and pleasure. That means when we question the size or shape of our piece of the puzzle, we’re really questioning God. When we refuse to interlock our piece with others, then we’re disobeying God. When we make a commitment to connect with Christ and with His people, He is pleased beyond measure.
Friends, God dreams of a church where black and white, American and Asian, rich and poor, farmer and business person, couple and single, cop and convict, student and senior citizen, lifelong saint and former sinner can all join hands and celebrate our designed diversity within the unity of the Body.

We are each distinct, and yet not one of us is more important than the other. Paul speaks to those who are filled with pride in verse 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!’” When a speck of dust blows into your eye, your finger instinctively rubs the eye. There is no debate from the finger about whether or not it wants to help. As the eye is rubbed and several fingers pull down the eyelid, the eye waters, causing the speck to be flushed out. Without the hand, including its specifically functioning fingers, the irritant would have remained.

As you look at your portion of the puzzle and compare it with those around you, you’ll quickly discover that yours is designed differently. The shape of your piece and the location where it fits in God’s picture of the church is distinct from everyone else. There has never been anyone like you before and there will never be anyone like you again. Your contribution to the kingdom is unique. Having said that, we must guard against thinking that we are more special than those around us. Instead of thinking that our piece is prominent and everyone else’s is a poor imitation, we must realize that we are all different, but that in the big picture, we all need each other.

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Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, is often quoted when talking about the importance of winning. What you may not know is that he was also committed to caring. He could throw things around in a locker room at halftime but he also said this: “If you’re going to play together as a team, you’ve got to care for one another. You’ve got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and say to himself, ‘If I don’t block that man, James is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his.” Lombardi went on to say that the difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feelings that his guys had for each other. Friend, you will never care for Christians, or non-
Christians for that matter, if you believe you’re somehow more special, more important, or better than they are.

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Like the players on Vince Lombardi’s team, caring for one another, as the church, we should be doing the same. If as the traditional service, we are praying for the people who will be worshiping at the praise service, then we’re caring for the other. If as a member of the Praise service we are praying for the many people involved in the Sunday School hour, then we’re a part of ONE BODY. If as the choir we’re praying for the Praise team and the music they will be providing, then we’re showing the love that Lombardi asked of his players. And as the church, this should be a given, expected, desired.

In this puzzle called the church, each piece is interconnected, not independent. The last part of verse 24 establishes the principle of interconnectedness. Your puzzle piece is designed to lock together with those around you in order to form the picture that was designed by the Creator. Notice again that it is God who not only arranges in verse 18, but that God’s desire is for each member to intermingle with others: “…But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it.”

Friends, when we’re put together just right, a stunning makeover takes place. God loves to take us with our weaknesses and tie us together with other scraggly people in order to make the beautiful body of Christ. For better or for worse, we’re stuck with each other because we’re stuck TO each other. This welding together of lives within the body of Christ has two purposes:

When God combines us, then there’s no room for disunity: “So that there should be no division in the body…”

We are commingled so that we can care for each other…having equal concern for each other. The original Greek says that we should “be anxious about each other.” That means that we should worry about the welfare of others.
That’s what Paul is saying should happen in the church. When someone is hurting, we should rally together to help. I’m thankful that this church is known as a caring community. Many of you here this morning can attest to the support you’ve received when you were in need.

Verse 27 provides a great summary statement: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” This isn’t an option…you are the body of Christ. And this isn’t just for a small percentage of people who serve or for those who take a membership class. Paul says that each one of us is a part of it. We live life together because we belong to each other. You are a piece of the puzzle at RUMC!

Commit yourself to take the next step in connecting to this body. Figure out how you fit and then plug into God’s puzzle. Pray and ask God to give you a practical way that you can come alongside someone this week. There are needs all around us. Some of us miss them because we focus more often on ourselves. Ask the Spirit to make it clear how you can care for another this week. It might be a note, a phone call, a meal, childcare, or some financial assistance. Remember, we’re called to care for all of God’s people.

Be vulnerable and ask others for help when you need it. This is something I do when things get crazy around here. The beauty of the Body of Christ is that people can support and care for you when your batteries are low or you when you feel you cannot go on.

God has placed you as a strategic piece in His kingdom work. You are an important part of the success and effectiveness of this church. Everyone else is depending on you to be here and to carry out your function. Did you ever work on a puzzle for hours and then discover that one of the pieces is missing? It’s not a good feeling, is it? Friend, don’t be that missing piece. Make the commitment as we wrap up this year, to surrender to the Savior, to accept the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and to become a part of the caring community here at RUMC.

PRAYER