

Sermon Title: “Joined into one Body.”

Sermon text: “1st Corinthians 12:12-30

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“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” (1st Corinthians 12:12).

Over the last week and a half we have watched graphic news reports of the death toll rising in Haiti. When the earthquake struck, houses, hospitals, and city buildings were razed to the ground. Many of those inside were pinned down in the rubble, with violent injuries – left crying for help. Many Haitians did not escape. The first reports suggested 10,000 dead, then 20,000, then 50,000, followed by reports of well over 100,000 Haitians feared dead in the aftermath of the quake.

Over the last week thousands of the people of Haiti are sleeping outside of their shattered homes for fear of the aftershocks of the quake. They sleep next to the thousands of dead bodies that line the streets, covered with white sheets. There are shortages of water and food. There is crying during the day and wailing in the night. Bones have been broken, skin has been pierced, and bodies are being buried. It is a time of immense suffering, where the age old question has surfaced again from the religious and unreligious – “why...why did this have to happen.” What happened to Haiti, you cannot put into words. There are simply not enough tears for the sorrow.

Saying such things as, “it will all be ok,” or “don’t worry God is in control,” or “everything works out for the best,” are phrases that sound awfully hollow during this time. They simply fall short. For those suffering and for us watching, grieving and praying these words seem to collapse, offering true comfort. Meanwhile, we see the pictures of the maimed and those lifeless bodies lined on the streets.

God does not provide his creation with answers that are always satisfying to our understanding. That is, in this dying world, there are many trying times when we cannot directly see God’s mercy. In the human experience it often appears that God is hiding or not present at all – maybe even angry. Luther once wrote in the midst of violence during his own time that God often “looks as an axe wielding murderer.”

Yet, in the midst of that terrible suffering and crying in the night, there are voices which have already shone forth – piercing the darkness. Once such voice is recorded from 11 year old Anika. Anika was pulled out from under the rubble two days after the hurricane leveled her home. The girls legs had been crushed, and we can only imagine the sense of pain and fear that she had to go through. Doctors reported to a CNN news correspondent that they had told little Anika that they would have to amputate her feet. Anika responded that she was not afraid and did not care. She prayed right before the doctors saying, “Thank you God, because he saved my

life...If I lose my feet, I always have my life."¹ It is as if she spoke the Word of God herself, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). Anika later that day died from her injuries.

It is only the work of the Holy Spirit that a child can confess life in the midst of death all around – and in the face of her own death. Little Aniaka, an 11 year old girl from Haiti, confesses the same faith as Saint Paul the apostle. She confesses the faith of us here gathered at Saint Paul Lutheran Church. She confesses that the earthquake is not her end, just as we confess that the tribulations we face, small in comparison to hers, are not our end. Our troubles, our shame, our hardships are not our end. Our sin, our painful bodies, cancer in the family is not our end. With Anika we say, no matter what happens, no matter what terror comes my way, 'Thank God because I always have my life.'

God has the final say - the last testament, "I am the vine you are the branches, take eat this is my body...arise and live!" Our Scripture reading today preaches that we are all one body in Christ. That is – we suffer together and die together in Holy Baptism and in the gospel. Right now, Haiti is that suffering body of Jesus Christ.

Paul writes that "There is no division in the body, for all its parts 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." Our congregation here is joined to the people of Haiti – joined to that suffering body. Our own members, Rachel Ehrhard, Kathy Craven, and Betsy (Is name?) had been planning on flying into Haiti for a mission trip the very day after the quake. To their great disappointment their trip has been postponed. Yet, they have been busy through phone calls, internet and email to verify the safety of their friends in the Puerto Prince area.

The students at St. Paul School through the week have helped remind pastor and I of praying for the people of Haiti. And they have suggested donating their chapel offerings toward the effort in Haiti. Being in the one body of Christ is not metaphorical of an idea. Being united with suffering Haitians in the body of Christ is a historical event. It is a present, daily reality that we are all a part of. And just as we are united with Christ in his suffering death so we are joined in His body in the resurrection.

When we confess the Creed, we confess that we believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. This is our final confession to those questions that we cannot fully answer. This was Anika's confession, for she knew that her own life and her own body was bound up in the life and body of the living God, whose life and righteousness He freely gives us. To a world that is at times a screaming nightmare, here we find our Sabbath rest – our Sabbath answer to things we cannot understand.

To be united with Aniaka and the Haitian people in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is 1000 times surer of an event than that earthquake. At His appointed time our Lord will wake his whole Christian church on earth from its slumber and pull them from their graves. Those broken bones will be healed. Anika's legs will be restored to her, pierced skin and every wound will be

¹ http://m.cnn.com/primary/_s0he91-ipsei8kB8N

healed. Every afflicted body will be restored and given a heavenly body, free from all pain and all suffering. The thousands of bodies that line the streets in Haiti will be raised and glorified. All that which has been lost will given back one hundred-fold - though weeping may tarry for a night, joy will come with the morning. Every tear will be blotted and dried by our gentle Lord and Good Shepherd Jesus.

Though there are many more tears to be cried, singing now dominates the sounds of the Haitian streets. And giving thanks, praising and singing, are the bodily activities of the people of Haiti. There are reports that the two favorite hymns are "O Lord, keep me close to you" and "Forgive me, Jesus," which are prayed and sung around the whole city.

We are all one body in Christ Jesus. We look for the resurrection of the dead and to be raised to the right hand of our Father. This is why the body of Christ sings for joy. This is why Haitians are praying and singing in the midst of death. We are bound for glory. Bound in and for the body of Christ. We know that where Christ is, there we shall be also. Though the earth may quake and tremble we cannot be moved. And though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea we have our strong refuge. God is with us. He has heard and answered every plea of those in Haiti, just as he has answered our prayer.

The city of heaven has been made ready for all by Jesus. This morning we sang of that last and final Word of God – that true and final comfort. Here the body rests.

“Ills that still grieve me
Soon are to leave me;
Though billows tower,
And winds gain power,
After the storm the fair sun shows its face.

Joy e'er increasing
And peace never ceasing:
These shall I treasure
And share in full measure
When in His mansions God grants me a place (LSB 726 stanza 3).

In the name of Jesus. Amen.