

All Hands on Deck

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[0 : 00] Just as you stand, let's pray. Almighty God, we thank You that in Christ You have called us together and made us a family, one body, living and serving out our ministries together, inspired by Your Word and filled with Your Spirit.

And Lord, I pray that as we gather together this morning, You would quicken all our hearts, that we might with joy and willingness find those places where You have called us to serve so that Gospel ministry might flourish in this place.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please be seated. And this is a rare kind of sermon today because it will be a sermon with homework attached, which you can do right away.

I always hated that in school when you got to have a nice lesson and you always had to do the homework afterwards. And so we're going to do a little bit of homework today and that has to do with these count-yourself-in-cards brochures which you will find.

So you will need to have that handy as well as perhaps your Bible at 1 Corinthians on page 164. So this will either be a short sermon or a long advertisement for the brochures depending on how you take it.

[1 : 22] And what we really want to encourage everyone to do on this Sunday as we head into summer mode is to really have a little think about the ways all of us can serve together in Gospel ministry as the body God has called us to be.

Because He has called us together. In Christ we have been brought together. And our job is Gospel ministry. How might we all serve together in Gospel ministry?

We notice that Paul writes, 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.

See, notice this principle here about the unity and diversity of the Christian family. We are one body in Christ. We have been filled with one Spirit.

We have been given His Word. And yet, we look around us here and we see that we are a diversity of personalities and backgrounds. We have a diversity of giftedness and passions for the different things we like to do.

[2 : 32] We all function in different ways. We have different abilities. And yet, we are one. We are one body united in Christ.

He says, All the members of the body, though many, are one body. So it is with Christ. Of course, He's using this body image, is He not? To show us who we are.

You can hardly separate your arm. That wouldn't work, would it? It all works together. And the ground of our unity is Christ. In Christ.

Because we are Christians. Because we have given our lives to Him. We belong to Him. And to one another. Mutually dependent upon one another.

Working together towards the same end for one Lord. And I think it's a lovely picture because it means we belong to each other and we cannot do without one another.

[3 : 30] This is not about having an elite doing all the work, taking all the glory. No, it's each one of us. We need each other. We need you. We need you. We need you.

The church in Corinth was a gifted church. Very gifted church. Spiritually very gifted. Very dynamic. And yet, spiritually immature. Some were exalting themselves over the others.

Super apostles. The super spiritual, lording it over the lesser mortals. And Paul says, No. Verse 13, he says, For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body.

Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of the one Spirit. See, for them, some were more spiritual than others.

Paul says, No. All were made to drink of the one Spirit. That means you, and that means me. We have been baptized. The same Holy Spirit baptized us all into the one Christian family.

[4 : 34] And this family transcends nationality or social class. All are filled with the Holy Spirit. Not just the superstars. See, and that's important for us to grasp today.

That we are one family in Christ. And in Christ, we are all filled with the Spirit. When you turned to Christ. That is to say, when you became a Christian, you on that moment were joined to Christ and became part of His people.

And the Bible tells us that in that moment, God filled you with His Spirit. You. And me. Each one of us. And He has given us His Word.

And so, brothers and sisters, we have everything we need right here in this place now to do gospel ministry. Right here. Right now. Everything we need. And it's us.

It's us. I've got just a couple of things I want to say. The first thing, as I look at this passage, is all hands on deck, which is the title I gave my sermon. All hands on deck.

[5 : 42] And here I'm looking at verse 14 and following. Paul says, For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. So again, this very important principle here for the Christian family, that we all belong and every member is necessary if this church is going to function properly.

We need every part of the body functioning if we are going to be able to fill out our gospel ministry properly. And that image of the body conveys that we need everyone involved in the Christian family.

We really need all hands on deck. And Paul is keying into a very serious tendency amongst Christians, which is to exalt a few super-Christians over the rest.

But also, what we so often do is to take a back seat and hold back and stay on the edge. See, look what he says. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body.

You see what he's saying? If you say, well, I'm not really involved. No, I'm not really part of things. You say, well, that makes no difference. You are involved. You are part of things because you are a Christian.

[6 : 56] Because you are in Christ. And so often we say that. We say, well, I'm just taking a back seat right now. Or, they don't really need me. Or, I'm not gifted enough.

Or, I'm just coming to receive right now. So often we sit ourselves on the edge of the Christian community. And Paul says, no. Paul says, you are part of the body if you are a Christian.

You have a vital role to play. We can't get along without you. You matter. You might think you are not part of things, but if you are a Christian, you are an integral part of the body.

It's because we can't all do the same things. Not everyone can be involved in full-time Christian ministry. But that doesn't mean that we don't all have a role to play. You might not be a preacher.

You might not be an evangelist. But you are essential. And we can't function without each one of us. We can't function fully or properly. And you see, Paul's words to each one of us here are an encouragement as much as a challenge.

[8 : 05] It's an encouragement for us to grasp and live out our membership in the Christian family. To live out our participation in this body to which we belong.

Because we're a family together. It's a glorious thing. We are brothers and sisters in Jesus. And for us to function properly and fully, we need one another.

We need all hands on deck. All of us involved in gospel ministry. But it is also a challenge to each one of us.

Because we are a body. And we need to work together. Every one of us. Jesus has given us a very clear job description for the church, which is to make disciples.

To preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. That's a huge task. That's big. And so we need all hands on deck.

[9 : 02] Not just the few. But everyone for the long haul. The worms really turned in my household a couple of weeks ago. And this is a tip for all parents of school-aged children.

Something I've just learned recently in my parenting. I've got a six-year-old and an eight-year-old at home. I was starting to empty the dishwasher. And my six-year-old daughter Eden came and begged me to let her do it.

And of course, I've often said, no, no, no. Just go play. It's easier for me to do it. Well, and then my Jonathan, my eight-year-old, came in and he wanted to get into the act. And I thought, well, why not? So a great fight ensued about who would do what.

And finally, we compromised and Eden emptied the dishwasher and Jonathan was going to fill it up again with the dirty dishes. So I stood and watched. And Eden, my little six-year-old, who stands about that tall, took a chair, put it up against the counter, and very carefully put each dish away in exactly the right place.

And my son took the dirty dishes and put them all in upside down. But he did his best. The next day, they switched roles. And they did it all again.

[10 : 08] And on those two days, they did this with joy and excitement and singing. And on the third day, I made them do it. And then it all changed.

And it became a chore, and there was crying and wailing and sighing. In fact, I was talking to someone on the phone and they said, what's all that wailing? And I said, it's Jonathan doing the dishes. And alas, a bit of their carefree childhood ended that day.

But they can do it, by the way. Six and eight, they can do it. But you see, the point is, of course, that our family life just goes so much better when it's all hands on deck, each according to their ability.

I can hardly expect them to mow the lawn. Maybe. They can't do the edging, that's for sure. But it's all hands on deck. All hands on deck. Doing what they can do.

Making the life of our family go better. Much more gets done much more easily. See, and that's what Paul is telling them and us. All hands on deck. But not for a dreary chore.

[11 : 08] For the work of the Gospel. Because we are called to work together to spread the good news about Jesus in this place in Vancouver. And that is glorious.

There is nothing like it. And there is a lot of work to do. Some of it is up front and some of it is in the back. And sometimes it does involve washing the dishes.

In fact, there's a great deal of industry going on in our kitchen right now. As much as it involves preaching the sermon. But it must all happen. We need all hands on deck for the long haul.

That's why Paul says in verse 17, Indeed, if the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God has arranged the organs of the body.

Each one of them as He chose. You see, God has so ordered the body that there is this multiplicity of tasks and gifts. Each one of us working together for the one end.

[12 : 08] There is no us and them. This is how God has established that the church should run. You know, one of the things I just love about St. John's, this congregation, is there is a great energy here.

There is a great commitment to service in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of places. And actually, it sort of defies organization. People serving and excited about ministry in all sorts of different ways.

Men's ministry, Bible study, missions. It's wonderful. And that's how it should be. Each one of us excited about it. What are you passionate about?

And yet, there is so much more we need. If we are to have a well-rounded gospel ministry, we really need all hands on deck. And there are some areas of our ministry where we have very significant need.

For example, in our childhood education, our Sunday school, such an important area. raising up our children to be Christian, what could be more important than that?

[13 : 17] And yet, there is a great need there of people willing to put their hands on deck and to serve for the long haul. There is so much, so much we can do.

We need all hands on deck. But secondly, and lastly, we also notice there is an upside-down family here. Look at me, I'm kind of at verse 20.

He says, as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. So we're coming back to the big picture. He says, the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body we think less honorable, we invest with the greater honor.

And then look down at verse 24. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members might have the same care for one another.

And you kind of see the problem this congregation is facing. It's very immature in the Christian faith. They're heavily into spiritual gifts, and some are elevating themselves out of proportion. You know, the super minister is the one that's all important, but the quiet person in the background, well, you don't count for anything.

[14 : 34] And Paul is quite simply saying to them, it is all important. Before God, it is all important. Gospel ministry is all important.

See, not just the super spiritual leader, the one person who becomes more important than anyone else, or one ministry taking precedence over anything else. See, it happens in congregations when we elevate one person or one ministry out of proportion to the bigger picture of gospel ministry.

Some churches today will emphasize spiritual gifts. You must have spiritual gifts. Otherwise, you're not the true blue. Or some churches will focus upon the ministry of one particularly charismatic or gifted leader.

Or some might just emphasize liturgy, or just ministry, or just social action. But you see, the danger is that if it is all about one person, or one ministry, or one thing, then the full gospel ministry fails to develop.

And that's the point here. We need a full gospel ministry. Everyone is important. Now, I'm glad to say that I do not think St. John falls into this at all.

[15 : 46] As a staff and as a leadership, we desire the widest possible gospel ministry. And that's why we need everyone. We value very highly the ministry of preaching, and especially of our rector, David.

His ministry of preaching blesses us so much. But we recognize that preaching takes the place in the context of gospel ministry. And there are many, many important tasks involved in gospel ministry.

Some visible. Others invisible. So often when you're involved in the invisible, that's hard, isn't it? Because no one really knows. You don't get written up or anything. But Paul is saying it's all so important.

And in our church here, preaching is a top priority. But it is not the only priority. That evangelistic conversation you have with someone is a top priority.

Teaching our children the Christian faith is a top priority. Putting on Bible-based conferences for women is a top priority. Raising up Christ like men is a top priority.

[16 : 57] Taking pastoral care of one another is a top priority. Brothers and sisters, gospel ministry is our top priority. And one part of that ministry is not more important than another.

We need it all. We need all of it. It's many parts, yet one body. This is an encouragement to each one of us.

For everyone who is involved in some kind of ministry, often those very invisible acts of mercy and love, a prayer prayed with someone, a word spoken, a child befriended, a meal cooked, a Bible study prepared, a sermon delivered, a postlude or an anthem practiced.

It is all important. It is all gospel ministry. And we need it all. And just imagine if we could harness the giftedness and energy of everyone in this building this morning.

There is nothing we could not do in tasks big and small, visible and invisible. What is it God is calling you to do? See, God has so composed the body.

[18 : 17] And we have the challenge and the joy of participating one with another. We have huge, wonderful resources here. Huge energy.

Huge passion. Huge skill. Many members. One body. In Christ. Serving Him.

I'd like you to take out these sheets. And what I want us to do, take a moment to be quiet and pray. And then we're going to give you an opportunity now to fill them out.

Now these are not for you to sign up to existing ministries you are a part of, but ministries you are not currently part of.

If you are already in the ministry, do not indicate that here. Because it will cause us great confusion. And what we'd like you to do is fill them out now and then we'll have baskets at the door, all the doors, for you to place them in at the end of the service.

[19 : 24] And there are three areas that we're indicating here. Welcoming and hospitality. Some very important ministry there. Welcoming people as well as practical jobs to keep our life together running.

And then serving. And then in discipleship. Think about what God is calling you to do for the long haul.

Let's be quiet and I'm going to pray. Almighty God, thank you that you have called us together.

We are brothers and sisters. And I pray that you will move in all our hearts to think more about how we can serve you in this place.

Serve the gospel. That your word might go out farther. That more people might be drawn to Jesus.

[20 : 41] And so we commit these cards to you now. I pray that you will be Lord and God of us.

And that in obedience and love we might serve. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
Amen.