

SERMON: “I AM A MEMBER: The Body.”

Rev. Geoff Ross Sun., September 9, 2018 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Vacation/Summer over: Back to work/school/Church – introduction/refresher/reminder: who/what we are/do – and why.]

Driving up to the cottage one night I was listening to the radio and the topic of loneliness came up. It's a curious problem; with billions of people – and all our so-called 'social' media – more and more are literally dying of loneliness. In the UK, the May government, stating, "Loneliness has reached epidemic proportions," appointed a Minister for Loneliness to the cabinet. In Japan, 'lonely' deaths are frequent enough that there is a word for it now. In the US, a former US Surgeon General wrote an article for the Harvard Business Review titled, "*Work and the Loneliness Epidemic*," that loneliness can be fatal. The segment ended with a sad – to me – statement: with billions of people in the world, someone should be able to figure out a system where no one is lonely; and I said to the radio, somebody did – it's called "Church."

And it's true! I've always believed that the Church is the last best hope of the world – that it is THE place where Jesus calls us to live out our faith/love, to "*love one another*" as Jesus loved us, to gather to know/love/worship God together; it is THE place where everybody is welcome, nobody is perfect, and by the power of the Holy Spirit truly anything is possible. The Church is God's saving plan for the world. To US theologian Dallas Willard "*God's aim in human history was the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons who live with/in Himself.*" Friends, the Church is where we belong/not alone – it is the house/family/Body of God where there's a place here not just for you/me/us, but also for everyone whom God calls/is in need of God's grace/hungry for community – a place promised/prepared/waiting for you.

But – for many reasons, both inside/outside the Church – the many [out there] see the "Church" differently. Rather than see the 'belonging/love/grace' of being a part of a spiritual family, a chosen – by God/made Holy/separate/apart – family in which all those who do "*God's will is [His] brother and sister,*" (Mark 3:35) "Church" has become a place/service you have to go to/attend – a hollow duty devoid of meaning/purpose – believing, instead, that "Church" is a closed/elite/special "club" only for the "saved"/good people – people. And, maybe, this is because too many Churches/Christians [in here] have forgotten who/what/why God created/wanted the Church to be/do!

[Lagos/Club:Pool/movies/drinks w ice! Servants. Club=privilege/perks – have/have nots. Misunderstanding 'membership'

Thom Rainer, in his latest book, **I AM A CHURCH MEMBER**, calls for a Church-wide reawakening/shift from the "preference driven Church" to a "purpose driven Church." Believing that, by reminding Christians/Churches of their created/called purpose the Church will thrive as The Body, he calls for a rediscovery of the true purpose of the Church where the whole focus is on the needs of our neighbours and not on our own. I do too. As we begin another 'season' of gathering to know God together it seems right/fitting to stake out clearly a few things that maybe go unsaid/assumed – and to dispel some others that might be misunderstood – about what "Church" is/should be, and who we are to be as Christians/Members/sisters and brothers in Christ. Like Paul in the two readings we just heard, Rainer seeks to remind us/Christians/Churches that, first and foremost the Church – as God

longs for it to be – is not about us; it's about what Jesus did for us through His self-giving sacrifice and about how we/you/me find belonging living out our faith in/love for God in/through our love for our neighbours by being a part of the Body in which you/me/we receive the love/grace/mercy that we give in a reciprocity of grace.

[Body:Cells renew/regenerate/grow constantly – all different/new/old/each essential – each exists to share/be part of a holistic exchange:oxygen/blood/etc. without – cells/parts atrophy/body dies. GI Joe:pin in the neck.]

In the readings, Paul reminds us of the implications/applications of belonging to/being members of the Body of Christ: that being a part of the Body of Christ means we are to live/lead/walk a life appropriate to our calling in Christ Jesus, live in unity through the Spirit, celebrate the diversity of our spiritual gifts, and grow – as a community – into maturity and faith. Life/membership in the Church is defined by our participation. To Paul the Body is both literal/figurative, real/representative: both Christ/of Christ. This means is that by belonging to/being members of the Church we belong to Christ **and are** Christ to the world.

[Rhyme:Church/steeple/doors/people – Church not a building/steeple/business/club: it's what's inside/hearts that counts/ it's us/you/me who make the Body/Church alive!]

Friends, the Church is a spiritual body with a spiritual purpose but for it to reveal God/Jesus' love/grace/mercy/acceptance to a world dying of loneliness – for the Church/Body to function – every member/you/me/we must play the part God has called us to play. We/you/me – the people who created/called/gifted by God/who belong to Jesus – are the/His Body in/to the world. This is what we are called to be/do – I AM/you are members/we are the Body – it is who we are. Amen.