

<sup>12</sup>The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup>Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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 cease to be part of the body. <sup>17</sup>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? <sup>18</sup>But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, but one body. <sup>21</sup>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!” <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>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, <sup>24</sup>while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. <sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

## INTRODUCTION

Do you believe in miracles? Now that may seem like a silly question to ask when I'm talking to a group of Christians. But if you were living in 1980 and were paying any attention at all to the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, that question might bring back some memories.

### DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?

“Do you believe in miracles?” was the question TV broadcaster Al Michaels shouted when the US Olympic hockey team defeated the Soviet Union. Just a week before the games started that year, the US had been soundly defeated by the Soviet team in an ugly exhibition match.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

So what happened? How could this ragtag group of players defeat the Soviets? Many have debated the answer to that. Some suggest great coaching, others a good game plan, and still others an inspirational team captain. But all agree on one thing—teamwork! Every member of that team realized what it meant to be on a team. Each one subscribed to the old sports adage, “There is no ‘I’ in team.” When they did that, a “miracle” happened.

### “THERE IS NO ‘I’ IN CHURCH.”

In our text today, Paul describes a miracle as well. He describes a team, a collection of very different individuals, who must work together in difficult circumstances. This team has a great coach, an inspirational team captain, and a fool proof game plan. The team Paul is talking about is the church, the divine collection of all believers. Those in Corinth and those right here. Over the next few minutes we will hear a Pauline pep talk that will remind each team member that “THERE IS NO ‘I’ IN CHURCH.”

### THE ANATOMY OF A LOSING TEAM

To reinforce this concept of “team,” Paul uses the body as an illustration. To be more specific, he calls the church “the body of Christ.” He says, “*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*”

### A CLOSER LOOK

So let's take a closer look at the body Paul describes. He first talks about the body of a losing team, an unhealthy body. One team member, the foot, says “Since I'm not a hand, I'm not worthy to be part of this body.” And another team member, the ear, says “I'm not an eye so I don't belong either.” So how could it come to that, members of the body not feeling they belong? Didn't other members of the body encourage them? Sinners like you and me do not naturally think of others. It is far easier for us to criticize or gossip than to encourage and speak well of one another. Is it any wonder others, even others on the same team, feel like outsiders . . . like they don't belong? We truly have become very accomplished at putting the “I” in church.

### THE NEXT SCENARIO IS WORSE

The next scenario is even worse. “*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?*” Can you imagine? The church is not about superstars. It's not about the pastor, the lifelong member, the highest contributor. While all play a part, none is greater than the other.

### NARCISSISTIC

And finally, Paul finishes off this rather negative look at an unhealthy body with an utterly narcissistic picture, *“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!’”* Narcissus was a mythical character who, after becoming thirsty, went to drink from a stream. As he saw his reflection, he fell in love with it, not knowing that it was him. As he bent down to kiss it, it seemed to “run away” and he was heartbroken. He grew thirstier but he wouldn't touch the water for fear of damaging his reflection, so he eventually died of thirst and self love, staring at his own reflection.

#### THE UNHEALTHY BODY

The unhealthy body, Paul says, has members that are self-absorbed, who are enthralled with their own reflection. By nature, that is every one of us. We don't need each other. And worse . . . we don't need God. And that fatal flaw, forged by original sin and cemented by our own sins each day, has put us at odds with an almighty God who demands death for those sins.

#### THE ANATOMY OF A WINNING TEAM

In stark contrast to the anatomy of a losing team is that of a winning team. Here is how it is described. *“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 combined the members of the body and has given 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.”*

#### A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE

What a beautiful picture of the church, the body of Christ: no divisions, equal concern for each other, compassion for suffering, shared honor, every part rejoicing. This sounds too good to be true. How is this possible? Because of the head, Jesus Christ. While it is true that Jesus is our inspirational team captain, he is much more than that. He is our substitute. He is the reason the church has any members at all. By God's grace, Jesus became one of us. He lived a life that none of us could ever live, a perfect one. He died a death that none of us could ever die, a death that paid for the sins of the world. He rose from a grave from which none of us could ever escape a grave that could not hold the Son of God, a grave that, because of its emptiness, is a foreshadowing of ours.

#### THE GAME PLAN IS GOD'S WORD

Now with Christ at the head of this team, this body is called to be about the victorious work Christ outlined. A hockey team would call that the “game plan.” The church would call it God's Word. It contains all the directives we need. And the beauty of it all is that God has put together this team to work that plan. *“God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.”* It is more than a loose collection of individuals united by geography and a membership. It is more than a collection of the members of this church. It's more than almost 400,000 WELS members across the globe. The church is an organism with life breathed into it by its head Jesus Christ, not just an institution of affiliated individuals. Through the miracle of baptism, we are teammates, all made in the image of God. We are members of the same body, all with gifts to use in his service.

#### WE ARE THE MISSION

All of us together, with our unique gifts and talents, don't just HAVE a mission; we ARE the mission. It was Christ's mission to save each one of us. We, the members of the church, were Christ's mission when he went to the cross. That mission has not changed. Jesus' team is to be about growing the team, to bring more and more into the body of Christ. Our work is real and urgent. As Christ's ambassadors we need to insure that our team is healthy and working together. This was Paul's point to the Corinthians. He saw some lousy teamwork going on. People thought their gifts were better than others. They were forgetting why God formed the church in the first place: to be salt and light, to grow in the Word, to care for one another, and to make miracles happen.

#### DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES? YES!

Yes, God wants miracles far greater than any hockey game. Each soul that once was lost and now is found is a miracle, made possible on Easter and manifested on Judgment Day. God has chosen you, and the person sitting next to you, our church, and other churches across our synod to “walk together” as salt and light, as team members, as forgiven sinners with a wonderful story of victory against all odds. Do you believe in miracles? Al Michael's answer in 1980 and ours in 2009 are the same . . . YES! Amen