

**2018 Susquehanna Annual Conference**  
**Saturday, Morning Bible Study – *Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball***  
**June 2, 2018**

The passage for this morning is Romans 12:1-8. Let's just begin by reading that together. I'm reading from the New Revised Standard Version.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.” This is the word of God. Thanks be to God.

So the purpose of the study this morning is to examine and help people to see and understand what it means to be one in Christ from this biblical text of Romans.

Let's begin.

I am, with your bishop, one in the line of singing bishops, and so, the words that I am going to share are: O, Lord, open our lips and we shall declare your praise. I am going to sing that phrase through twice, and then I just want you to join me as we kind of center in.

(Singing)

O, Lord, as we open your word this morning, don't just open our lips, but open our hearts and our minds and our very spirits, that we might dwell awhile, sit in your presence, seeking your wisdom, wanting to hear your word and do a little deeper in our walk of faith. Open us up, Lord, that we might hear or consider something that we've never thought about in a particular way before. And as your word works within us, help us to hear your challenge and your call in our lives in ways that kindle, in ways that spark, in ways that ignite a new fire. Not only among us as individuals, but together as the body of Christ. One in Christ, so that we can be one in ministry to all your world. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

(Slide One)

As we study this passage, we study under the backdrop of God. We look to God for direction and inspiration. We look inward to examine what has hold of our hearts, minds, and spirits. And we also look outward to see where Christ is already at work in this world. And to receive the challenge to join Christ where Christ is already working. So it's a seeing, a motivation toward God and with God. It's an inner, opening up our inner eye to wrestle with ourselves. And it's

also seeing outwardly, so that we can truly grasp, perhaps in a new way, what God has called us to do and who God has called us to be.

I am going to us several slides that are actually paintings. These paintings are copyrighted in 2008. The artist is **Becky Callier Dohman (sp?)**. She is a member of the West Virginia Conference. A member of the United Methodist Church, United Methodist Temple, in Beckley, West Virginia. And her paintings are, in fact, called, "The Body of Christ." Inspired by her study of the Scripture and her seeking to understand what it means to be one is Christ's body.

We're going study right now under the gaze of these eyes, but we'll see more of the panels as we go along in the study.

When we study a passage of Scripture, we realize that it exists in a certain context. Let's take a moment to paint the biblical background of this text from Romans.

The letter to the Romans is a communication overall about the love of God. The writer defines love in this letter as a redeeming love. A love for every one of us who is still under the power of sin. It is a love that reaches out to us and wants to encompass us, even though controlled by our own human nature, we fall short of the glory of God.

The writer shares with us that God initiates our redemption before we are ever aware that we need to be redeemed. Now some of you will recognize that fits in very well with our Wesleyan understanding of grace. We would call this in our Wesleyan understanding prevenient grace. That grace that comes before. That grace of God that chases us and woos us into a recognition that God, in fact, pursues us, God's created children, and wants us and loves us, even though we are yet sinners. That's just how great God's love is for us, the writer of Romans wants us to know. But letter isn't just about that all encompassing, chasing, pursuing, wanting, seeking love of God. It's also a letter about what our response should be to this love. In response to this love, God's love that will not let us go. This letter tells us that we are to turn the entirety of our lives toward God, so that day by day we are continually transformed to become more like Christ.

The writer emphasizes that this becoming like Christ is a process. And it's a process that doesn't just involve one simple aspect of our lives. It is a process that involves heart and mind and will and actions, as we become new persons who want what God wants. Becoming new persons who want what God wants. This is, in fact, the process of becoming one in Christ.

Romans is both a theological and a practical discussion of how growing into the fullness of life in Christ, becoming one in Christ is a matter of heart, mind, and spirit.

Throughout our inner struggles, throughout our struggles with others, we are drawn by God's amazing and incredible love in Christ Jesus. Again, this is a love we do not earn, and we cannot lose, but a love that seeks us out and brings us along in the spiritual life. Nothing that we have done or will ever do can separate us from the love of God that is offered to us freely in Christ Jesus our Lord. What a gift this letter is. What a gift to dig in and study a piece of this letter.

Let's turn to the particular text right now.

Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, I urge you by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God. Sit with that for a minute.

Let me read it again, and just make some notes about what words within these two verses pop out at you. Therefore, I urge you by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

As I asked you to turn to your neighbor, there was a little laughter, probably a little nervousness. Maybe what I picked out from this verse wasn't quite what I should have picked out. There is a lot in these two verses. A lot in two small verses of Scripture. Now I am not going to ask you what words came to mind, but let's walk through these first two verses a little bit here.

Note these verses begin with that word "therefore." No matter what version of the Bible you have, there is this word "therefore." Which means these verses are connected back to something else. So this is linked to something important that has come before in this letter of Romans. What has come before? Well, if we look back in Romans, we discover what has come before is a discussion on God's grace and our faith. The writer, Paul, did not want anyone to make the mistake of thinking that simple faith is the only action we are called to in response to God's love. In other words, folks, Paul wants to make it very clear that faith is not simply about belief. A simple believing. Actually, Paul emphasizes this in Chapter 6. If you take a moment to go back at some point and look at Chapter 6, he makes a very strong point. He says there, "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? May it never be. We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer?" That's from Chapter 6, verses 1 and 2.

In other words, he says, simply believing is not enough, because that actually gives us permission to continue living in sin. If we only continue living in sin, and depending upon the grace of God to kind of overlook and deliver us, that's not the point. That's not what we're called to. Here at the beginning of Chapter 12, Paul comes back to this idea and re-emphasizes that faith, true faith, should result in something more than just a simple belief system. It should actually result in the living of holy lives. Faith and faithfulness are linked together. So Paul goes on here to give some practical application in regard to faithful living and faithful discipleship.

Here comes the practical. We are to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Now, Paul here was writing to a Gentile community in the Romans. There are two Greek words for body: sarx and soma. When Paul is talking about bodies, people who are hearing this letter, both of these words would have come to their minds as they kind of heard his dialogue in his letter. Now sarx is most often translated as "flesh." External, physical body. Understood as worldly and opposed to God. Now soma is also understood as physical, mortal, and weak. But Paul, as Paul uses it in his Epistles, soma is not external to the person, but is one aspect of the whole person united in body and spirit. Paul's Jewish background and understanding are getting inserted here in a way that would have been totally revolutionary to his audience.

Paul's Jewish understanding of the sacred text would have [understood] and view persons holistically. Body and spirit were understood to be compatible, important, sacred. This would have been a very different understanding of the body in the minds of the Greek dualists, who were listening in. Those Greek dualist would have understood the body as something to be endured until the spirit or soul could be freed of it. In other words, their understanding is this body really kind of imprisoned and limited the soul and spirit.

Paul's understanding of body would have also stood in opposition to the Gnosticism of his day and hours. Where the physical, material world is understood to be evil. Greek dualists would never have suggested that we offer our bodies to God, because for them that offering would be inherently unworthy of God. And Gnostics, because of their understanding of the physical body as evil, would deny both the incarnation and the divine nature of Christ.

Paul, in his letter, presents and emphasizes something very different from the thinkers of his day. Very different. For Paul, both body and spirit are essential to human life, and both body and spirit are compatible with Christian discipleship and our relationship with God. Think about that.

Think about the ways that you have interpreted Scripture sometimes when we thought about body. And think about the ways you have heard others interpret that word body from the Scripture. Often we get caught in some of the same kind of thinking that the dualists and Gnostics get caught in. We either think of our bodies as somehow imprisoning our souls, or we think of our bodies as some kind of evil or non-goodness.

Paul makes very clear here our bodies are part of our whole being and person. Sacred, valuable, beloved by God. It's not just that God touched our souls and spirits when God created us in God's image. No, God touched our very substance. All that we are has been touched and molded and given and shaped by God, not a part of it. We are whole beings. Becoming one in Christ, therefore, involves the transformation of our whole being, both body and spirit. A living sacrifice.

In the Old Testament we read in numerous places about animal sacrifices. Sometimes those Bible studies make for really interesting conversations. Torah law required Jews to observe a very complex system of animal sacrifices to atone for sin and to remind people of the significance of their sin.

Animal sacrifices were holy, because it involved taking something precious. A life, and offering it to God. Now think about this for a moment. It involved raising an animal from birth. Think about that. An animal that you have raised and protected and paid special attention to. You have raised this animal to see this animal slaughtered and then to eat a portion of the meat as an act of worship. You raised this animal. Now some of you who have been raised on a farm know what I am talking about. You've raised this animal to be perfect. You've protected it. You've made sure it was cared for. It got the best food and the best care. It was protected from enemies and predators. Because, you see, only animals that were without blemish were acceptable offerings. So this would have been an animal that you coddled and you paid attention to. You lived with. These animals were perfect, so to speak. The best. How gut wrenching it had to have been to watch that animal be sacrificed for your sin.

Now, the letter to the Romans is not really written, as I've said, to a Jewish community. Paul instead is writing to Gentile Christians in Rome. And these Gentile Christians would have felt no obligation to offer animal sacrifices. It would not have been a part of their heritage, tradition, or teaching. Paul, however, is teaching them in his letter that to be transformed into the image of Christ involves a sacrificial obligation. No less challenging than the animal sacrifices offered by the Jewish people.

Paul is, in fact, talking about the sacrificial aspect involved in growing in oneness with Christ, and saying to the Gentiles who were listening, this kind of living sacrifice will go beyond

whatever you have heard or understood as the Jewish animal sacrifice. Think about that for a moment. The sacrifice we are called to give goes beyond, beyond the animal sacrifice.

Paul suggests something very bold here. He is saying that Christians are not to substitute an animal's life for their own, but are required to sacrifice their own lives. This requirement, however, no longer involves a ritual slaughter, but instead is the presentation of the living person, the entire life of a person to God. It doesn't mean we can compartmentalize and separate off a piece over here. It means the whole of all that we are. With Christ, the sacrifice has become a life sacrificed in service to God. A life committed to doing God's will. A life lived in faith and out of faithfulness, this living sacrifice, is not a once and done animal sacrifice, but a 24-7 sacrifice. There is not a moment or a circumstance where the Christian should not be a living sacrifice. This is not just a Sunday morning thing. Or a mission trip thing. This is a 24-7 thing. Living a life dedicated to faithfully fulfilling the will of God after the example of Christ. Wow. That's a lot. It's all that we are.

In Jewish animal sacrifice, the slaughter of the animal was to remind the person that apart from God's grace, it would be his or her life that would be required on that altar.

Now Paul tells the Roman Christians and us that now our lives are required as a sacrifice, but not on the altar. Instead, we are to offer ourselves, our body, heart, soul, mind, and spirit, as living sacrifices. Paul emphasizes that living sacrifices are holy, because they represent becoming one with Christ. In living in accordance with the will of God, this is your spiritual act or service, whether lay or clergy, to live lives dedicated to God's service is worship, and the logical outcome of saying yes to Christ, and making a decision to follow Christ.

Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Perhaps one or two of you picked up on that word conformed, or transformed, as you shared with each other. What does it mean to be conformed? Well, to be conformed looks like fitting in, adapting, adjusting to what is around you. It is like drifting with and following the crowd. Someone conformed to this world freely embraces the next fad or the next popular thing. You pop from one thing to the next, never really knowing exactly where you are going or why, just following the crowd. It's kind of mob mentality, and we see this happening all the time. And we see people gathering together and coalescing around what's the least emotional denominator. Think about it. We've all at times been caught conforming to the world, going along with the crowd.

Do not be conformed. Instead of being molded by the crowd, be molded and shaped by the kingdom. To be conformed means that you allow the whims or the beliefs of other people and the fads of the world shape you. Paul says do not be like this. Paul says instead be transformed. Being transformed gets at the core of your being. Being transformed is more about metamorphosis. Remember the caterpillar and the butterfly. Remember those images that we tend to reserve just for Easter. It's not just an Easter occurrence.

For a time, that caterpillar is one thing. And then by the grace of God, it becomes a very different thing. So it is with us if we are to be one in Christ. Once we were just sinners. People that allowed ourselves to be conformed to the whims of the world, but by the grace of God we are being transformed into something wholly different. People who look and act and live more like Christ. More like holy people of God. Being transformed involves not just your physical bodies, but your mind. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, Paul says.

Behavior follows belief. Have you ever notice that? Behavior follows belief. If you don't believe that, why do people go and buy lottery tickets? I mean, seriously. People will get in their cars, they will alter their day, they will take a side track home, they will save special money in a drawer. They will tell their spouses one thing so that they can have the time to go and get this. People will tell you, oh, it's just a game. I love just playing the game. It's fun. I just like scratching off those things. They'll try to convince you that it's really nothing. But why do they actually go through all of that to buy a lottery ticket? It's because of the belief. Maybe it's a mustard seed kernel of belief, but it's a belief that they just might win. Their behavior follows belief. Behavior follows belief.

Paul calls for us to allow God's spirit to transform our minds. Jesus said, in another place, that whatever come out of a person makes them unclean. Remember that? Paul knows that the transformation of our minds, a transformation of the stuff that whirls about inside of us, will soon lead to a changed heart that will lead to a changed transformed way of living. Godly thoughts transform every aspect of our being.

For example, those persons who train their minds to Godly thoughts enjoy improved health, get through the stress of changes and challenges of life better. I know one of those persons. A person who all the medical experts in the world proclaimed would be dead. And yet that person took the steps of wholly transforming their mind to Godly thoughts. And that person, it's been over twelve years since they thought he had no more days to live. And today he credits allowing God to transform his mind with the very gift of life, an active quality of life that he enjoys today.

People who allow their minds to be transformed are people who are less likely to become the victims of substance abuse and promiscuity, workaholism, worry, and other unhealthy practices. Behavior follows belief. Now why would we be transformed by the renewing of our minds? Why would Paul want us to do this? So that you may prove what is good and what is pleasing and what is the perfect will of God. That's why. Folks, we become what we eat. The nutritionists were right. We become what our minds eat, so to speak. We become that with which our minds are consumed. So the renewing of our minds enables us to discern the will of God.

Now many persons assume that God's will mirrors their own. And that they have discovered truths or truth that makes them superior to other Christians. I know that's no one here. Well, the example of Christ is one of humility.

Paul reminds us in another letter, in his letter to Philippians, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Think about that for awhile.

To be one in Christ means that we also do not consider God to be something to be used to our own advantage. The discernment of God's will does not happen when we try to remake God in our image, trying to make God conform to our thoughts, our desires, and our beliefs. Discerning God's will is about allowing God's Spirit to renew our thinking. It is about trusting God and allowing God to place God's hands on us, allowing God, in fact, to shape and reshape our thinking, and thus our living.

Wow. Two verses. Two verses. That's all we've been through, folks. Two verses. A lot, right?

So Romans 12:3, “For I say through the grace that was given to me, to every person who is among you do not think yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think reasonably as God had apportioned to each person a measure of faith. Different words here. The word “for” connects to the grace given with the renewal of our minds. Paul believes that it is the renewal of one’s mind that helps us to think of ourselves realistically and humbly, knowing that all that we have has been given to us by God. We are the beneficiaries of God’s grace and God’s gifts; gifts that have been given to us by the Almighty, and therefore, we have no right to feel superior to another who has been given different gifts and graces for the living of these days.

This was a very important message for Paul. Remember Paul is from Jewish heritage. He comes from a background where Jews, God’s chosen people, thought wrongly that God had chosen them for privilege instead of for service. He desperately wanted to communicate to the followers of Christ not to take on that kind of superiority attitude. Unfortunately, we followers of Christ succumb to this failing nevertheless. Even to the point where we put down or, worse, tear apart and condemn other Christians whose views are different than our own.

Often times we are tempted to think that the very gifts God has given us to make the body of Christ healthy and whole are superior to the differing gifts God has given to others for the very same purpose; for building up the body and building God’s kingdom. And when we do that, when we set ourselves up as superior, we actually hurt, dare I say destroy, the work of the church and its mission to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. Following Christ is not about putting others down or condemning others. In fact, I believe that the Scripture tells us that Christ did not come into this world to condemn the world, but so that the world might have life. Followers of Christ are not about putting others down or tearing others apart, but our purpose is to lift people high. God has given differing gifts to each person made in God’s image. And God has gifted each one of God’s children with a measure of faith. Paul reminds us that none of these gifts are given for boasting, because all of it, gifts, grace, faith, they are all gifts of God, and something that we have not earned or achieved.

So we are one body in Christ. Can we go back to the very first slide? The one before that. For even as we have many members in the one body, and all members don’t have the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, individually members of one another. So it is with the church, which has many members, each with differing gifts and able to contribute in particular ways according to the grace that is given us.

In these verses that I just read, Paul continues to plead with the people to think of themselves realistically and humbly by comparing the church to a human body, you recognize this familiar metaphor from his other writings in I Corinthians 12.

Let’s look at the screen for the moment. We have been studying this passage under the backdrop of God. This painting represents the eye in the body of Christ, described in I Corinthians 12. We look to God for direction and inspiration. And out ahead of us, and around us, God’s eyes, we are to be God’s eyes in this world. We are to take note of where Christ is needed so that we may also be God’s hands and feet and ears and arms as we relate to others.

Now you’ll notice in this painting, it’s not just about the eyes, but there are hands, a figure in the background, which represents God’s loving arms and protection around us, as a parent holds a child. The closed eyes down in the corner remind us about the insight we can share and gain from our conversations and our prayer with God. Paul says we are one in this body and differing

gifts, and that God, in fact, as we attempt to become one in Christ never lets us go. Hands are outreached and encompassing and encircling us as we look, as we desire, as we seek God's will the eyes are the entry place to the mind in lots of classical thinking. So as we take in Christ, our minds are being transformed in the midst of a loving God who knows that as we go through this process we deal with difficult stuff. And sometimes we are confronted with the fact that we have been wrong, or we might be wrong.

Next slide.

The painting draws attention to again another aspect of the body that Paul talks about. It draws attention to the way that we can be the hands of Christ. By giving each other support in good times and in bad. By holding each other up when we don't have the strength, the experience, or the knowledge to stand alone. Minds that are transformed by God's grace and God's power understand this power of presence, this power of being a Barnabas, of holding up others when they can't hold themselves, and praying for others when they don't have the words. We are one in Christ.

Next slide

The painting shows the body of Christ as we remember Christ, and re-member, become knitted together once again around the sacraments. This process of re-membering is not about bringing to mind all that is in the past. It's about to bring us to the very presence where we are brought together and re-membered, knitted together. This is the means of grace. We gain more of God's grace that transforms even more of our minds when we allow ourselves to be knitted together through this re-memberance in the sacraments. By participating and experience body, mind, and spirit coming to the table and being a part of communion. Communion. Community. One with each other. The transformation of our minds allows the table to be transformed into the meeting place of God. The intersection of human and divine.

Next slide

The experience of sound is represented by the ears hearing the word of Christ. No, not just hearing, but receiving that word into our being through the conduit of our ears. Receiving that word in ways that it becomes one with us. Remember, remember our minds are what we eat. Our ears as well as our eyes become the conduit for the stuff that goes around and gets wrestled with in our minds. The outreached hand here depicts Christ calling us, or our response to hearing God's word, or about hearing our call by reaching out to others. It can also be interpreted as receiving the word and then offering it as a witness to others. You see, when we allow our minds to be transformed by God's thoughts, that things that we see and hear cannot just take on new meaning, but multiple meanings in ways that we never dreamed imaginable.

Next slide

Our mouths. Our mouths and how we use them can be a significant gift, or not. When we use our mouths with renewed minds, we can use our mouths for preaching, singing, teaching, and communicating God's love to others. Our mouths, they must be guarded, because once a word is spoken, it cannot be taken back. I think this is why Jesus warned us, it's what comes out of a person that makes us unclean. Once it's out, we can never take it back.

Hmmm.

The hands here, planting a bulb, show how our hands can be the hands of Christ. When we are sowing seeds of faith with others, our mouths and our hands work together to plant seeds. The hands with the candles, candles are passing on the light of God's grace and love and mercy. You know, I think we saw that depicted here yesterday morning. Those candles and the passing along remind us of how important it is to have conversations and actions that ignite. Not, not just ignite, kindle and spark, so that we actually get to the igniting stage. Yes, we are one in Christ, and one body.

Next slide

Now, now we see the receiving of the Holy Spirit through baptism, or foot washing, or the receiving the gift of God's Spirit through water. The Foot washing reminds us of humility and servanthood, as we are Christ's body called not to be served, but called to serve others. Just as Christ came not to be served but to serve, so are we in Christ called to do the same. And as we see the hands pouring, the feet being washed, we are reminded that God says to us the same words that God said to Jesus as water poured out on him, and as the heavens split open, "You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased."

Next slide

The Holy Spirit ripples out. The feet there on the Bible shows how we are grounded in our faith by allowing the word of God to move us from being conformed to this world, and allowing God's word to transform us by the renewing of our minds. Study is part of the renewing of our minds. We are covered by God's grace and save by grace as we become living sacrifices to be one in Christ. The feet remind us that this is not a once and done thing. This is a journey to be transversed, traveled throughout the whole of our lives. The hands serving soup are feeding new Christians, or literally feeding those who are hungry, as we are called to do in the one body. Physical and spiritual feeding.

Next slide

We are one in Christ. These are all the panels you have just seen. The Colors in the skin of those panels reflect the idea that we are each unique in our gifts and talents and abilities, personalities and appearance. Just as Paul describes the body both in Corinthians and in Romans, none of us are exactly alike, and that is a gift. God loves us all, and God's Spirit is reflected in each of us in different ways, as portrayed in this portrait of the cross and the body. Although we are different, we are not all the same in that, but we are all together in this one body.

The bands of colors running throughout the painting depict the Holy Spirit around us and in us. And the way that God's Spirit shines catches fire through each of us in our unique ways. And that all of these ways are needed, because this picture would not be complete if there was anyone missing. The body of Christ, the church, works best when all of these members work in harmony, just as happens when the members of the human body work together in harmony. We all have gifts. We all have the opportunity to be knitted together in Christ.

Paul ends this particular passage by saying, "Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given us, if prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or service, let us give ourselves to service; or the one who teaches, to his or her teaching; or the one who exhorts, to his or her exhorting; for those who give, let them do it with liberality; for those who rule with diligence, for those who show mercy, with cheerfulness." Paul wraps up this particular

portion of Scripture by mentioning seven specific gifts in these verses: prophesy, ministry or service, teaching, exhortation or encouragement, giving, leadership, and compassion or showing mercy. Paul's point here is that God has given to each person gifts and graces. The church is best served according to Paul, and God is best served according to Paul, by honoring and celebrating each person's gifts and graces in ways that emphasize that all are needed and all are valuable. We should not value one over the other. And we should not use our gifts for selfish gain.

Spiritual gifts, the definition of spiritual gifts, are gifts given by God to be used on behalf of others. Let me repeat that. Spiritual gifts, the definition of spiritual gifts, are gifts given by God to be used on behalf of others. This is Paul's point in this passage. We are one in Christ, and therefore, together we are to be God's blessing for others. Service offered and done out of selfishness will not be a blessing to anyone.

So, you who are gifted with prophesy, you are one in this vastly beautiful body of Christ. So prophesy. You will bring more health and wholeness to this body by using your gift on behalf of others. Serve as bearers of God's good news, but be careful not to move past God's revealed truth and move into personal opinion or speculation.

And those of you, those of you who are gifted in service, serve. You, too, are one important piece of this vastly beautiful body of Christ. Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked. Those of you, those of you who are gifted with teaching, go teach. Together in this body of Christ, we cannot continue to grow without you using your gift on behalf of us. How will our minds be transformed if teaching and learning is not taking place?

Those of you, those of you who are gifted in exhortation and encouragement, coach us. Coach us in encouraging and supportive ways, Paul says. You need to cheer us on in this journey of life and faith, so that we might not fall apart or fall away in the midst of challenging and anxious times.

Those of you who are gifted in giving, give. And givers are not just the wealthy, folks. We are one in this body of Christ, and when we work together, we will discover that we have great gifts that are available to be used on behalf of others. The gifts of many ordinary but generous Christians can do great things for God.

Those of you gifted in leadership, lead us with a vision. Be diligent and persistent in Christ's goals for the building of God's kingdom. And be careful to do the work well, helping not just a piece of the body, but the whole body to move and work together.

And finally, those of you who are gifted in showing mercy with cheerfulness, provide help. Help for the least and the last and the lost. Help those on the margins. Help the whole of this body to keep moving out to the margins with joy and thanksgiving, so that all might have the opportunity to find and experience the presence of Christ.

Folks, Paul reminds us we are one in the body. We are one in Christ. All members of it. So go. Go, and use the gifts given to you on behalf of others so that others might come to say yes and make this one body of Christ even greater and fuller for the building of God's kingdom, and for the transformation of not just our own churches, not just this Conference, but the world. Amen.