TITLE: Unity in Diversity

TEXT: 1st. Co. 12:12-30; Ro. 12:4-5; Ephe. 4:11-13;

Jn. 14:12

INTRODUCTION: This coming Thursday is Thanksgiving.

The First Thanksgiving was celebrated to give thanks to God and the Native Americans for helping the [pilgrims](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrim_%28Plymouth_Colony%29) survive the brutal winter. Although half of the [pilgrims who arrived](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_passengers_on_the_Mayflower) on the Mayflower had [already died](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Mayflower_passengers_who_died_in_the_winter_of_1620%E2%80%931621), many more would have had it not been for the native Americans teaching the pilgrims to harvest foods.

The first Thanksgiving feast lasted three whole days providing enough food for 53 pilgrims and 90 Indians.

The traditional Thanksgiving menu often features turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie. Americans may eat these foods on modern day Thanksgiving, but the first feast did not consist of all these items. On the first feast turkey was any type of fowl that the pilgrims hunted.

The foods included in the first feast included duck, geese, venison, fish, lobster, clams, swan, berries, dried fruit, pumpkin, squash, and many more vegetables.

Thanksgiving Day is presently celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November and has been an annual tradition in the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) since 1863. It did not become a [federal holiday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_holidays_in_the_United_States) until 1941.

Thanksgiving was historically a [religious](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion) observation to give [thanks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gratitude) to [God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God), and is still celebrated as such by many families, but is now also considered a [secular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularity) holiday as well.

This morning I want to talk about something that each of us here can and should be thankful for as a Christian this Thanksgiving...And that is the Church! The body of Christ.

Do you realize and appreciate the gift that God has given us in the Church?

For it is only within the Church, the body of Christ, that we see the full reflection of Christ and the full power of Christ in the world in which we live.

Before we will ever fully appreciate and be thankful for the body of Christ we need to understand just what the body of Christ, what the Church is…

When Scripture speaks of the Church it is not referring to a building with 4 walls, a floor and a ceiling, but it is referring to the mystical and corporate body of Jesus Himself, it is referring to all those who have received Jesus as their personal Lord and savior and have received Gods promise of the Holy Spirit to indwell their hearts.

As I was preparing this message and thinking about how does one define the Church, the body of Christ in a way that would accurately represent the biblical example in as few words as possible, how does one adequately define it.... When contemplating a short definition of the body of Christ I came up with these simple words--- "unity in diversity".

This is the biblical definition of the Church!

"Unity in diversity"

The apostle Paul's teaching concerning the Body of Christ..

**1Cor 12:12 (NIV) 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.**

**13 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.**

What is the Apostle Paul talking about here?

He was talking about unity in diversity!

He likens the body of Christ to our physical bodies...

**1Cor 12:12 (NIV) 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.**

**13 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.**

What is this speaking of? It speaks of unity in diversity!

Paul uses the most diverse of the earthly situations of his day as an example of this unity in diversity here.

**For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-**

Particularly to the culture and in the minds of those Paul was speaking directly to here, there was no higher state of diversity in the worlds view of that day then the difference between that of a Jew and a Greek or a slave and a free man.

Jew's and Greeks (gentiles) were as diverse as you could get from the worlds perspective.

An orthodox Jew wouldn't even walk on the same side of the street with a gentile if they could help it.

A slave and a master were viewed to be extremely diverse.

That diversity brought separation!

A Jew and a gentile would never fellowship with one another.

The owner of a slave would never fellowship with his slave.

This kind of diversity among peoples has always been divisive in the world in which we live. Things that separate and divide.

From the worlds standpoint this is still often true today.

If you don't think that diversity is basically divisive in our world today then just look at what is happening in Washington DC and most states between the two political parties.

There is great diversity and there is even greater divisiveness!

It seems to be kind of an un-written rule in the world in which we live that diversity brings division. It separates and divides.

But Scripture says that, in Christ, in the body of Christ, within the Church, things are not to be that way!

In the body of Christ there is to be unity in our diversity!

**1Cor 12:12 (NIV) 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.**

**13 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.**

Paul goes on using our physical body as a metaphor for the Church, for the body of Christ..

**14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.** (ie our human body is very diverse)

**15 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.**

**16 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.**

**17 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?**

**18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.**

**19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?**

**20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.**

**21 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!"**

**22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,**

**23 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,**

**24 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,**

**25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.**

**26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**

How true this is!

God has placed our physical body parts together, even though they are very diverse in appearance and function, to operate in perfect unity and harmony.

When we are healthy and everything is working properly within our bodies we experience the reality of this.

Even when we may have a body part that is not healthy or functioning properly we also see the reality of this.

Example: My Broken arm and shoulder has affected all the rest of my body as well----on a bad day my whole body suffers together....

On a good day my whole body rejoices together....

What Paul is saying here is: So it is to be In Christ! So it is to be within the Church body!

**There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.**

**26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**

**27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**

**Roma 12:4 (NIV) Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,**

**5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.**

In other words, God has placed you within this part of the body of Christ for me and He has placed me within this part of the Body of Christ for you.

Even though we may be very diverse as individuals God has placed us together, as He has determined, within His Body to operate and function in complete unity and harmony having equal concern for each other even though our individual function within the body may be different.

**1st Co.12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.**

**29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?**

**30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?** (Obvious answer is NO!)

Richard Rothe....

*God does not require that each individual shall have capacity for everything.*

*No one person has all the gifts that make the Church a complete body! But God has gifted us individually to come together and make the Church body complete!*

In short, there is no part or member of lesser or greater importance or value within the body of Christ!

Every one of you is equally important and necessary to make this part of the body of Christ complete!

So what does that mean? Each and every one of you here this morning is, not just important but essential, if we are to function as God intends His Church Body to function....

Folks if we lose sight of this fact or don't grasp this fact, then we seriously hinder, not just this particular part of the body of Christ, the local Church, but we are also hindering the corporate body of Christ, the universal Church!

How? We will not function in the power of unity that God intended!

**Ephe 4:11 (NIV) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,**

Why?

**12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up**

**13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

Folks, unless and until we grasp the importance of each of our placement in the body of Christ and become responsible to God for that placement we will never reach the whole measure of the fullness of Christ that God has for us.

-- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones described the Church of today well when he said:

*“Men and women no longer take exercise in sport as they used to. Instead, people tend to sit in crowds and just watch other people play. There was a time when people provided their own pleasure but now the radio and television provide their entertainment and pleasure for them. And I fear that this tendency is even manifesting itself in the Christian Church.*

*More and more we see evidence that people are just sitting back in crowds while one or two people are expected to be doing everything. Now that, of course, is a complete denial of the New Testament doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, where every single member has responsibility, and has a function, and matters. “*

Many say that the Church today is not being the force for God in our world that it has been in times past and I think that that is true in a lot of ways......

And if that is true is it because, we the Church, as a whole, have lost sight that as individual members that comprise the Body of Christ, we haven't realized our importance and significance within the Body of Christ, and haven't been responsible to God for the place that He has placed us in!

I think that The Church, in a lot of ways, has shackled and crippled itself by our not taking responsibility for our personal placement within Christ body!

Often our focus seems to be just on our diversity.....

Example: a lot of young people that I have talked to and ministered to have said that they had become disillusioned with the Church... many contend that they left the Church because it is full of hypocrisy...Some say that they didn't feel accepted...or even wanted.....

Church we need to examine ourselves!

Our we living the lives that we profess, not just 2 hours on Sunday morning, but 24-7!

Are our children seeing consistency in our faith? That who we are on Sunday at Church is who we are monday through Saturday at home?

When someone comes into our midst for fellowship do we reach out to them with the love of Christ regardless of how diverse or different they may appear?

Are we truly experiencing unity in diversity where each part has equal concern for all the other parts....

If and when we do it will make a profound difference!

It will make a profound difference in our own lives and it will make a profound difference in the world in which we live.

We will start to move in the power and purpose that God intended.

A story that I have shared before that illustrates this a story of a man moving his barn.

Herman Ostry's barn floor was under 29 inches of water because of a rising creek. The Bruno, Nebraska, farmer invited a few friends to a barn raising. He needed to move his entire 17,000-pound barn to a new foundation more than 143 feet away. His son Mike devised a lattice work of steel tubing, and nailed, bolted, and welded it on the inside and the outside of the barn. Hundreds of handles were attached.

After one practice lift, 344 volunteers lifted and slowly walked the barn up a slight incline, each supporting less than fifty pounds. In just three minutes, the barn was on its new foundation.

What does this illustrate to us?

If a bunch of neighbors can unite together in their diversity and do great things, do greater things when they unite together with a common cause and a common purpose then they could do individually, then what is the potential of the Church if we would fulfill the biblical example of the early Church and unite together in our diversity, each one of us being responsible to God to the position that He has placed us within the Body of Christ?

The answer is obvious! There is nothing that the Church couldn't do! Nothing would be impossible! We would actually be able to fulfill the Great commission that Jesus left us with---to go out into the world in which we live and make disciples of entire nations!

It is to this kind of Church, a Church united in their diversity, that Jesus was speaking to when He said:

**John 14:12 (NIV) I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.**

Paul said:

**It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.**

**... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

If you are here this morning, if you consider this part of the body of Christ, Oak Grove Church to be your Church body then it is because it was God who placed you here!

He has arranged the parts of the body just as He has determined!

And if God has placed you here then know that you are not just important but you are essential to make this part of the body of Christ complete! God has a purpose and a plan for you to bring fullness to this body!

And when you are not here then there is a body part missing and the rest of the body will not function in the completeness that God intended, and it will hinder the rest of the body to coming to the maturity and completeness that God intends!

I have heard many people say over the years:

You don't have to go to Church to be a Christian! I can worship God out in the timber!

I used to say that myself! On those days when after working a 70 hour week and wanting to go pheasant hunting on my only day off that may have been a Sunday.

There is truth to those statements! Just going to Church doesn't make us any more a Christian then sitting in a garage will make us a car, and we can worship, and should worship God wherever we are at. But that is not the real point!

We don't go to Church to become a Christian, we go to Church because we are a Christian and the Church is where we go to fulfill our duty to unite with the other Body parts bringing unity and completeness to the Body so that the Body will be built up and reach maturity in the faith so that the Body can do that which God has called and commissioned the Body of Christ to do!

To help equip each other, and build each other up so we can go out into the world in which we live with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and bring lost souls into the Kingdom of God…

To go out into the world in which we live being a reflection of Jesus to those around us..

Among the things that you have to be thankful for this Thanksgiving are you thankful for the Body of Christ and the place that God has given you in it?

Have you committed yourself in your diversity to the unity of His Body?

Are you determined to fulfill the responsibility God has called you to as a part of His body, the Church?

**But God has combined the members of the body…so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.**

....**to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

Is it your desire to become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ?

The only way that can happen is if we commit ourselves, in all our diversity, to be united together in the local Church Body. To commit ourselves to be the body part that God intended for us to be to bring completeness to the rest of the Body.

Prayer