

## **Building Our Home Together**

### **Part 3: Whose Home Is This?**

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Season of Commitment 3; November 10, 2019

#### **Text**

12 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. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

#### **Reflection**

This past Sunday afternoon, a group of 27 people from our congregation visited the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in the University of British Columbia campus. The visit was led by our own Sheila Carnahan, a member of the Reconciliation Group and also a volunteer tour guide at the Museum. I was impressed by our East Asian people's enthusiasm to know more of the First Nations history and Sheila's superbly informed and moving presentation. Our translator Linda was very helpful for whose first language is not English.

One of the learnings from the visit for me was to be introduced to the ceremonial practice of potlatch. Since I come from Eastern Canada, the potlatch was new to me; it is mainly practised on the Northwest Coast and in parts of the interior western subarctic. So, it was a good opportunity to be informed of the First Nations' ceremonial practices where I live now. While the practice and formality of the ceremony differ among the First Nations, it was commonly held on the occasion of important social events such as marriages, births and funerals. A great potlatch might last for several days and would involve feasts, spirit dance, singing and theatre.

The image of the potlatch stayed for a week in my mind as I was preparing for the season of commitment. For the last two Sundays, supporting our stewardship theme – "Building Our Home Together," – our reflection topics were "Finding Home" and "Be My Guest." Through these worship services we have all been invited, affirmed, and like Zacchaeus, called to be one of God's own, one of God's honoured guests.

From Sheila's presentation I learned that historically, the potlatch functioned to redistribute wealth in what some refer to as a gift-giving ceremony. In fact, the meaning of potlatch is to give. According to Elder Agnes Axu Alfred, many people believe that a rich and powerful person is someone who wealthy. But the people in her nation believe that a rich and powerful person is the one who gives the most away. Guests witnessing the event are given gifts. The more gifts given, the higher the status achieved by the potlatch host. The potlatch ceremony marks important occasions in the lives of the Kwakwaka'wakw. (see <https://umistapotlatch.ca/potlatch-eng.php>)

The image of potlatch is that of a great feast. In our faith tradition, Jesus is certainly considered the worthy host of a great potlatch. He would invite everyone, including those considered strangers and sinners at that time. He would go around inviting everyone so that they would all feel at home regardless of who they were. At this party there would be no higher or lower places: all of us are the precious children of God.

In the Haida tradition according to the Rev. Dr. Martin Brokenleg, often at a potlatch, new names would be given and proclaimed many times during the ceremony. If a new responsibility was given, it would be explained so everyone present would know where it comes from and what it requires. If the potlatch is similar to the image of God's great feast, it would be that occasion when we are given new names and identities in God's family. Everyone would be claimed as God's own children. New names and new responsibilities require a new image of the faith community.

What, then, is the new, refreshing image of the home in the faith community we hope to build together? Let's return to today's scripture reading. In our New Testament reading, Paul resorts to the metaphor of the body that was widespread in antiquity, in order to underline that members of the community have different gifts and functions. Of importance here are not the functions but the differences with which we have been gifted; our differences are not obstacles to the building of God's body; they are the gifts with which to do it. Moreover, we cannot say that one tradition or culture does not belong to God or that we cannot belong to one another. Those members of the body who are considered weak or more dishonourable were given special attention and great honour by God. God is on the side of the weak, oppressed and powerless. We all belong to one body and one God, so there are no divisions in the body; all its different parts have the same concern for one another.

In this spirit we gather together to build our home. In our home we need many different gifts. We need all our different gifts to build our home together. In this home we practice this wisdom: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together ..." (1 Corinthians 12:26). We build the faith community we call our spiritual home as a way of increasing our joy together and sharing our concerns. So, then, the church is for others. The purpose of our faith community is to extend this spirit to others and for others. Our mission will not finish until we all rejoice together.

As we build our home, whose home is it? This is your home; this is our home. We cannot build our home until we all roll up our sleeves to do God's mission together. In this mission, our

differences are God's gift. Your differences and your own unique gifts are invaluable resources for building God's kin-dom through West Point Grey United. So, we respect one another, cherish our differences and appreciate our togetherness. They make our lives rich. They make our home vibrant.

Whose home is this? It is God's and ours. We celebrate God's presence in our mission and ministry together. On our faith journey we are the witnesses of potlatch. We practise the image of potlatch when we share our gifts together. When we experience and live in God's image, then we will never be the same again. Here is the reason: "If one member suffers, all suffer; if one member is honoured, all rejoice" (1 Corinthians 12:26). Thanks be to God who is with us always! Amen.

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