



Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche Schweiz
Église évangélique réformée de Suisse
Protestant Church in Switzerland

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President Präsidentin · Présidente

One Body of Christ

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Sermon text from 1. Corinthians 12

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.

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.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is a great honor and joy for me to celebrate the service with you today, and I thank you for the invitation to preach the sermon. For the past three and a half years I have been President of the Protestant Church in Switzerland PCS. And already from my first days in office, I have known that the relations between my church and the Protestant churches in South Korea have a long tradition. Understanding these relations better and strengthening them are matters of great importance to the PCS. Therefore, I am glad that this trip could take place and that I can be here with you today.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free... and we might add: whether Swiss or South Koreans, ... we were all made to drink of one Spirit.



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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This is the reason why we are together here this morning. In everyday life we are around 8700 km away from each other, but through our baptism we are united in the one body of Christ.

Yes, we are one body, as Paul says. But we Protestant churches are so different. In Europe and in South Korea. How do we make unity visible, into something that can be experienced? How is our unity in Christ more than just beautiful words?

The sermon text from First Corinthians shows us a way:

Ever since I have experienced the church in its plurality through my ministry, I have been captivated by this image of the church as one body with many different members.

Paul introduces this image because in the church of Corinth, there were Christians who thought they were better than others. They looked down on others. They considered them to be less gifted spiritually. Because of this, the congregation was in danger of falling apart. Therefore, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul argues – several times and using various fervent arguments and images – against this tendency toward division in Corinth.

And he employs the metaphor of the body.

If an organism is to function, it needs all of its parts in their diversity. We must keep all of them in mind if we wish to do well, even the so-called weak parts. Because if they are no longer doing well, sooner or later the whole organism will be affected. This is not easy to do already in a local congregation. So how do we apply this metaphor to a global church?

If our body of Christ is to do well, then we must take special care of the weak members. In the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, this principle was expressed as follows: the strength of the state is measured by the welfare of the weakest. Only when the weakest are doing well, we are strong. But this raises the question: who are the strong, and who are the weak members? We are always tempted to see the others as the weak ones whom we should take care of. One is himself never the weak member. One may be disadvantaged or feel abandoned. But people never feel like 'the weak ones' themselves. Especially as churches, we like to be there for the weak.

Who are the strong, who are the weak – that is one question – and the answer is not clear. And it can change.

But the other question is: what does Paul actually mean by 'weak'?

By 'weakness' Paul does not really mean a shortcoming, but a place where God can be experienced. He writes in 2 Corinthians that strength finds its perfection in a place of weakness (2 Cor. 12:9), or as Luther translates it, that the power of God is mighty in the weak.



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Being a Christian means to build on the idea and trust that divine strength can unfold in everything that is weak. From everything weak, sick and sad can strength, vitality, and the joy of living develop through the divine power of transformation. This is the mystery of the resurrection, the mystery of Easter. Paul can say almost exuberantly: 'So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me...for whenever I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10).

Therefore, we should be especially attentive to everything that seems weak to us: in ourselves, in the communities we live in, in the society with which we share a common life. For here, in the weak, is hidden potential strength. God wishes to reveal his power here, and new life arises here.

And this is why we should also ask ourselves: where are we ourselves the weak, where does God himself wish to reveal his strength?

We should also ask ourselves as churches the following: Where are we weak as churches? And we should look at this weakness with particular care. Because where we are weak, God's strength can unfold.

In Switzerland - as in the whole of Western Europe - we are confronted with the fact that more and more people are leaving the churches. Both the Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Up until 50 years ago, over 90% of Swiss people were either Reformed or Catholic, but today this figure has fallen to just under 50%. With this loss of members, our resources with which we can realize diaconal and social projects are also decreasing. We are called upon to adapt our structures. But we also need to rethink our missionary mandate in a secular, multi-religious society.

Yes, we are losing power and influence in Switzerland or Western European society. That is painful - but at the same time it is also beneficial. Because powerful churches are not always vibrant churches. That is why I have great confidence that we will emerge from this weakened situation stronger and renewed. Perhaps not stronger in terms of our numbers, but in terms of our commitment to following Christ.

In this situation, the fellowship with our partner churches is very encouraging. For example, we are learning a lot from our partner churches in the Middle East. We are deeply impressed by how the Protestant congregations in Lebanon and Syria were helping the refugees and the victims of the earthquakes – regardless of their origin and religion. We are amazed at how the Armenian Protestant Church in Aleppo and the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) immediately established temporary shelters where several hundred people were able to receive warmth, blankets, food and hygiene products. We are amazed at how they are keeping Sunday schools open for all children, so that they might experience fellowship, joy, and hope in this still dire situation.



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In Switzerland, their helping hands were a preaching mouth. People who do not belong to the church at all and do not believe in God have seen in the news and newspapers what people who are moved by God can do.

I am also grateful for the invitation from the PCK and the PROK to their synods and to the anniversary of the NCKK. The Korean Protestant churches are experiencing a lot of pain due to the separation from their brothers and sisters in the North. We learn from you what it means to persevere in prayer for one another. We learn from you what it means to pray for peace and reconciliation, even if it still seems far away.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are one body of Christ. For 2000 years - around the globe. Together we pass on the testimony of Christ. The testimony of love of neighbor, of the likeness of God to every human creature, the testimony of the integrity of human dignity. This witness has changed the world. Let us help each other to uphold it.

Because we are one body of Christ. Sometimes weak, sometimes strong. Always concerned about each another and learning from each another.

Amen.