

One of the songs suggested for today was Casting Crowns' "If We are the Body," which brought the band to immense prominence. So I wanted to give you a bit of background on the song from the group's lead singer, Mark Hall, who drew inspiration from his time as a youth pastor, when he noticed some inconsistencies not just from the younger children of God, but the more advanced in age as well. In an interview, he said (paraphrase),

"I was trying to communicate to 20 teenagers in Alabama, where I was serving as a youth pastor while in college... They'd been going there since they were six years old. And they'd become really used to church, but the rest of the world isn't used to it. And when the world tries to come into the church, it's like trying to come into a circle. And there's no way into the circle. Their friends don't come, because they don't feel a part of this. Inside our circle, we know where all the rooms are, we know all the songs, everybody's names. We sit in the same place (evidently, that's not just a Lutheran problem). But the picture the world is getting from that is not in the Bible. If we are the body, you're not just some young person in the youth group, you're not just someone working

in the church, you're not just some parent dropping their children off. You are strategic, and you have a ministry in the body. And God has given you all the gifts you need for whatever that ministry may be. It's really the life you were created to live: to be a part of the body. And we're missing that, because we feel that ministry takes place on a stage or altar with the lights shining down, and that's not true. That's not in the Bible anywhere. We're all hands. We're feet, we are part of God's voice. We are important. We are the body."

So, as we will sing here shortly the song that was released just over twenty years ago, and has been belted out in sanctuaries and youth group rooms and long car rides and even in more secluded spots where someone might be struggling with their faith, with God; Casting Crowns over and over again, calls us to remember the people who bravely come into this circle: some who aren't so sure they're worthy of it, some who struggle with their past, or even what their future might entail. And time and time again, Casting Crowns and Jesus Christ himself calls us to remember that we have a pivotal role to play in being a living glimpse of

a body that will reach out to and pull in absolutely everyone, pull in everyone to a grace that is for everyone, a Gospel that is for everyone.

Unfortunately, as the song reminds us as well, sometimes the teasing laughter and judgmental glances whether in or outside the church will carry greater weight than our attempts of love and compassion after the fact, and so the circle of the church becomes all the impenetrable for others to enter. And yet, thankfully, Jesus will reach even further than us. Christ will always keep embracing the outsider, the ones who aren't so sure they're worthy of the song, the baptism, the Communion, the grace, the God of the world. Jesus is God's yes to it all, including to us, who may not always believe how pivotal our role is in being the body today. And no matter how much we may not always live up to it, time and time again, Christ inspires us with water and bread and wine and even the songs to captivate us with the grace that is not only meant for inside the circle, but reaching all over the world, that for some reason, God loves just as much as ever. So, for that Greatest News for us all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!