

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

In recognition of the record-breaking low temperatures we've endured this past week, I thought it would be appropriate to share this little document with you as we begin our time together this morning. It is titled, "Pointers for Keeping Warm in Church"

- *Rush to the front of the church to avoid the draft in the rear.*
- *Invite your neighbors and friends and sit 10 people to a pew*
- *Seat yourself as near to the front as possible as excess hot air is always emitted from the pulpit*
- *Fuss and fume when you don't like what the preacher says.*
- *Wear thermal underwear in appropriate liturgical colors*
- *Wait for an unfamiliar hymn and then watch the sparks fly!*
- *Let the Holy Spirit fill you ... it will warm your heart and body!*

And now, from keeping our bodies warm to being the Body of Christ, hear now these words of scripture from the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. Listen for a word from the Lord!

“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. 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. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to 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. And if the ear were to 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. 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 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.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 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; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:13-27)

What do you think of when you hear the word “body”? Is there anything more familiar to us? After all, we live within these bodies of ours every hour of every day of our lives. And we know all too well that all the parts of our bodies are interconnected. If one part suffers, the others suffer too. Think about how it feels when you have a toothache or headache, or stub your toe, or crack your elbow? Think about what it’s like when you have the flu or a bad cold, or when the

pain of arthritis makes every step a painful one? Or you break your arm? Think about what it's like when one part of your body isn't working the way it should or the way you would like? Most of the time, we find that when one little thing isn't working the way it should or is causing us pain or discomfort, everything we try to do is affected. It can disrupt the thinking power of our brain, the concentration power of our eyes and ears, and the productivity power of our hands and feet. Remember that old child's song ...

**The leg bone's connected to the knee bone,
The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone,
The thigh bone's connected to the hip bone,
them bones, them bones, them bones.
The hip bone's connected to the back bone
The back bone's connected to the neck bone,
The neck bone's connected to the head bone**



It's true ... when it comes to our bodies, EVERYTHING is connected. When one part doesn't work right, it affects everything else in our body and it affects the way we are able to do basic tasks that at other times seem so simple.

It's true ... when it comes to our bodies, EVERYTHING is connected. When one part doesn't work right, it affects everything else in our body and it affects the way we are able to

basic tasks that at other times seem so simple.

And we know too that our bodies come as one package with some parts we like and some parts we don't. Perhaps you really like your eyes or your hands, for example. Or you have great legs or a winning smile. All of us at some point in our lives — perhaps especially as young people -- have complained and lamented about some body part that we simply cannot stand. That



“Of course, I could never be perfectly happy (because) I cannot imagine my red hair away. It will be my life-long sorrow.”
-- Anne of Green Gables

famous and beloved teenager, Anne of Green Gables, cries out in distress at one point in her story, with all the drama a teenager can muster, “Of course, I could never be perfectly happy (because) I cannot imagine my red hair away. It will

be my life-long sorrow.”

We know the body must be healthy for it to function most effectively and properly in the world. When we study microbiology, we learn that at the most basic level of human life, when we consider cells and chromosomes and DNA, every little thing and part must fit together perfectly inside of us in order for you and me to simply be sitting here right now as normal, functioning, operative human beings. The human body is an amazing and complex and

The human body is an amazing and complex and beautiful creation of God! It is a whole and single creation and yet it has many members and parts each having their own function so that the whole can truly be whole.



beautiful creation of God! It is a whole and single creation and yet it has many members and parts each having their own function so that the whole can truly be whole.

The body of Christ. Many of us who are connected to the church are also familiar with this type of body. Using the image of the intricately woven human body to talk about the church is a favorite metaphor of Paul’s. And it is not surprising, really, that Paul would use this image. The Greeks and Romans of Paul’s culture had a great appreciation for the beauty of the human body. And, after all, it is great way to think of the church. We are many members and yet we are one gathering. As the head is necessarily connected to the foot in our human bodies, so we are connected to each other in the church. As the ear needs the eye to see and the eye needs the ear



In using the human body as the metaphor for the church, Paul is saying that a group of believers, the church, is greater than the sum of its parts. We are not a homogenous group of like-minded and like-abled people. Rather, we are a diverse group of different parts, assembled by God to represent Christ in the world today.

to hear, so we need each other. We are, in Christ, one body with many members. We, as the body of Christ in human form, reflect the harmony of God's own character and represent God's action —

God's hands and feet and voice and heart in the world. In using the human body as the metaphor for the church, Paul is saying that a group of believers, the church, is greater than the sum of its parts. We are not a homogenous group of like-minded and like-abled people. Rather, we are a diverse group of different parts, assembled by God to represent Christ in the world today.

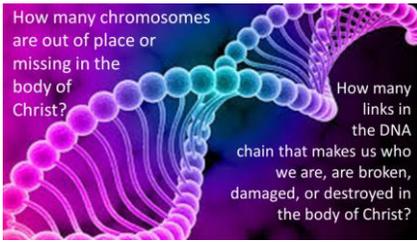
We are one body—the body of Christ



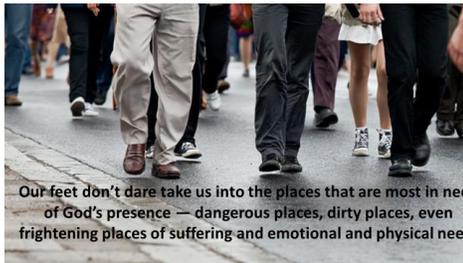
Like pieces of a puzzle, we are all connected — we make up a whole. When we stop to think about it, this seems a little scandalous, a little invasive. After all, a person's body is very personal and

extremely private. And so to imagine that we are now God's body is astounding. To think that we belong to God so intimately, that God holds us so close that we are given the title of being God's own body — hands, feet, eyes, ears, heart — well that's pretty startling. Actually, that's down-right scary! It's quite a daunting responsibility, and one that I'm not convinced we carry out all that well.

In addition to that, the image of the church as the connected and harmonious body of Christ is rather idealistic. After all, we may *say* that we are all connected. In theory, it may be very accurate indeed, but do we, the church, the body of Christ, really embody the harmony of God? If the inner workings of this contemporary human body of Christ, like the inner workings of our own physical human body, must fit together perfectly in order to function effectively in the world, then we might as well throw in the towel now! How many chromosomes are out of

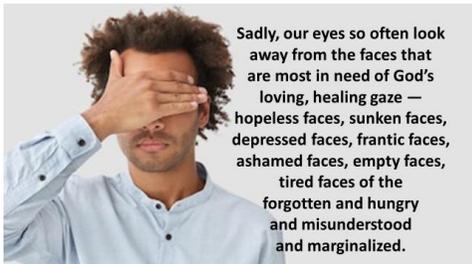


place or missing in the body of Christ? How many links in the DNA chain that makes us who we are, are broken, damaged, or destroyed in the body of Christ? How many parts think they don't need any of the others in this independent, highly individualistic culture we live in? How many parts of the body of Christ that need the most protection, the most respect, the most care, are in fact forgotten, exposed, in danger, hurting or abandoned?



If we are God's hands, feet, eyes, and heart in the world, then, I dare say, the world and we ourselves are in woefully deep trouble. "Huston, we have a problem." You see, our feet don't dare take us into the places that are most in need of

God's presence — dangerous places, dirty places, even frightening places of suffering and emotional and physical need.



Sadly, our eyes so often look away from the faces that are most in need of God's loving, healing gaze — hopeless faces, sunken faces, depressed faces, frantic faces, ashamed faces, empty faces, tired faces of the forgotten and hungry and

misunderstood and marginalized.



And our hearts — well, it seems that our hearts simply can't hold all those people, all those places, all those needs the way that Christ did all the way to the cross. How can WE be the body of Christ? What are we to do? Where should we start?

Perhaps we should start by acknowledging with absolute honesty that this body of Christ is far from perfect and is unable to properly function on its own in and for the world. We've got a wounded and incomplete body in the church, my friends. There is little doubt about that. The body parts are flawed, some are missing, some don't work anymore, some don't care anymore, some don't even think about it. And when the parts are flawed, they don't fit together very well. There are cracks that some fall through and wrinkles that some trip over. We've got eyes that refuse to see what is too difficult to look at. We've got sharp tongues that can cut like knives if we aren't careful. Believe me, I know. We've got feet more comfortable propped up on the couch than at work in a hurting world. We've got hearts that are often self-centered and fenced in rather than opened up. It's easier that way, and safer.

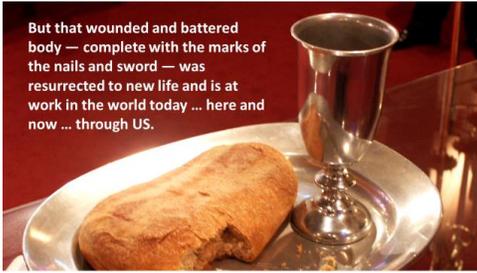
As part of this honesty, we need to ask some difficult questions of ourselves. What parts of the body are most neglected, most forgotten, most misused right here within our own church? If there's one thing that more than 30 years of ministry have taught me, it is that everyone has problems and struggles and doubts, even when, from the outside looking in, it looks like their lives are perfect. Perhaps there are people among us, right here and right now, who feel as though they are dispensable or no longer useful to the rest of the body because of their youth or their advanced age, or disability or frailty or past indiscretions or mistakes. Perhaps there are people, right here, right now, who are struggling with sickness and illness of body, or heart, or mind but no one knows what to say or do and so as a result, no one says, or does, anything. There may be parts of the body, right here and right now, perhaps teenagers or children, who somehow have gotten an unspoken message that they aren't very important and can't contribute

much to this body and so they are under-valued because of their youth, their different tastes, or their “wild” and untraditional ideas and perspectives. Perhaps there are members of this body, right here and right now, who honestly, though secretly, think sometimes it is true that the church would in fact be better off and more effective without certain eccentric, elderly, disruptive or overly needy parts. Do you think? These are important and difficult questions to consider, and we must not answer them too hastily. The most forgotten, hurting parts of the body are often hidden from us. We are so good at assuming that all is well with everyone and every part, as long as our own part is working all right.

I wonder, given these honest reflections about the body of Christ, what we should do with Paul’s beautiful body metaphor. We don’t seem to be able to represent a whole and wound-free body. Even when we try our best — and we must try our best — to be mindful of all and care for those parts of the body most neglected and forgotten, the body will still be wounded. What does that mean? Is that a recognition of hopelessness? Should we just give up and not even try? I don’t think so. The most important questions remain to be asked. Whose body are we really talking about? *Whose* life binds the church into one body? Ours? No. Not ours, but Jesus Christ’s.

God chose to come to us in the form of a human body. And in so doing, God shows us that our human bodies are to be honored and cared for. And in his human body, Jesus showed us that all human bodies, all human beings, are important and valuable to God — the bodies of the sick and diseased, the bodies of the scorned and disdained and marginalized of society, the bodies of children and elders. Jesus healed and fed and cleansed human bodies. And

furthermore, Jesus gives us hope for wounded and broken bodies. His own body was wounded, battered, tortured and eventually, killed. But that wounded and battered body — complete with



the marks of the nails and sword — was resurrected to new life and is at work in the world today ... here and now ... through US. Isn't that a big part of what we celebrate each week as we take in the communion elements? That Christ's body broken

and blood poured out become a part of who we are as the church at work in the world today.

We can look through the lens of this broken body of our Lord and see the beauty and life-giving power of resurrection and hope for all human bodies, individually and together as the church. The truth is, we don't need to be perfect to act in God's love in the world as the body of Christ. We don't need to be wound free and immaculately dressed to share love and joy with one another and with the world..

The truth is ... and the GOOD NEWS is that God takes the wounded and broken body of the church and gives it the distinction of being the BODY OF CHRIST. God takes each individual part — your part and my part — and gives it dignity, and gifts ... a role and a function, endowing each with spiritual gifts that we are discovering, despite our imperfections. And then, there's even more! And the, God calls us to use those gifts as we reach out to a hurting and fragmented world. God takes all the scattered and scarred and scraped-up parts of the puzzle, of the Body, and puts them together, even with all the cracks and wrinkles, with the short-sightedness and imperfections, and raises us up to new life again and again so that we can still be at work in the world. **We ARE the body of Christ!**

Time of Dedication - (back of bulletin) Teresa of Avila was a mystic, reformer and writer in the 16th century. Among her works is this poem which is especially relevant today. I invite you to join with me in reading her words and substituting the pronouns that she wrote with the first-person pronouns in parenthesis. Let us read together ...

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours (ours),
No hands, no feet on earth but yours (ours),
Yours (Ours) are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,
Yours (Ours) are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours (Ours) are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours (Ours) are the hands, yours (ours) are the feet,
Yours (Ours) are the eyes, you (we) are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours (ours).
No hands, no feet on earth but yours (ours),
Yours (Ours) are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours (ours).