

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Body Parts

“What part of the body are you?” This was a question asked in a session I participated just over ten years ago. There was a group of about eight of us and there was an outline of a body...the head, neck, torso, arms, hands, legs, feet...all drawn out on a large piece of paper on the table in front of us.

“What part of the body are you?” Each of us pondered that question for a moment. Some were pretty quick to place their marker while a few others pondered the question deeply. Then this scripture that we just heard read today was shared about the body of Christ. If you are part of the body of Christ where does one place themselves?

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians spoke about the foot, hand, ear, eye, nose, head, as well as what he called the less honourable parts. I recently read an article about someone wondering if they were a nose hair in the body of Christ. I had never gone there before. However, the more I have thought about this scripture over the years, the more I think that I could have placed myself in various spots on that body. Sometimes I feel like a mouth, not just because of the fact that I preach and I like to talk, but also because sometimes I get a bad taste in my mouth after encountering certain personalities. Other times I feel that maybe I am the nose as I smell the beautiful aroma of people expressing joy and hope. Many times I feel like I am part of the heart as I spend time just listening to others, although that also makes the ear important. And yes, sometimes I think I might just be a nose hair and nose hairs have a purpose, but it seems so insignificant compared to the other parts of the body. We could go on and it could get colourful in imagery and imagination depending on where we go with it, but you get the drift.

Thing is, we are all part of the body of Christ. We come with different perspectives and experiences, from diverse cultures and ethnicities. Some are affluent, others scraping by. Some are musical, others can't tap a beat or sing in tune. Some are human calculators, others of us count on our fingers. Some can speak three languages and others can only speak one. There are differences in education, life experience, knowledge, wisdom, opportunity, and ability. Yet, Paul does not differentiate. He does not say that the one who has more money, opportunity, knowledge, or whatever is more important than the one who is struggling, has not traveled the world, or has less education. In fact, he emphasises that “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.” (v24) I am not crazy about the word inferior, as one person is not inferior to another, and that was Paul's point.

There is no hierarchy in the body of Christ. All parts are necessary regardless of how we humans might want to view things. All parts...all people are necessary. We might spend some time on this. In using this metaphor of the body, Paul is illustrating just how important every Christian is to the body, regardless of ability, power, struggle, or accomplishment. There is an absolute connectedness in our being the church and we are not the church without each part. This goes for our congregation but also for the church worldwide, something to consider in this Week designated world wide for the Prayer for Christian Unity.

Now, if this passage is familiar to you then there is nothing that I can say that is really new, it is truly just as plain as Paul writes, we are interconnected, we are diverse, we are dependant on one another, and we are only the church both in our community and in the world when we value all of what each of us brings. Sometimes we don't even know what we bring to the body of Christ, but we can trust that even when we can't see it, others may be able to.

For the last few weeks our household has been watching the Emmy award winning series *Ted Lasso*. Now, despite the very colourful language that permeates nearly every scene, the premise of the story line could also be an example of what Paul is trying to teach in and through his letter. The story is about an American college football coach finding himself coaching football in the fictional English football club AFC Richmond, remembering that what they call football we think of as soccer.

Each character in the story from Coach Lasso, to Rebecca, the owner of the franchise, to each individual football player and supporting staff, as well as the fans, become part of the whole community or body. The whole is interconnected. Each is necessary or there is no team and no reason to play. All the characters come with challenges and with gifts, but without each person, there is not team. And when one of them is hurting it affects others. What is beautifully woven into the story is how they come together to support one another in their joy and in their pain.

Paul wrote in the letter, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (v26) This is how it is in the story of the AFC Richmond football club and how it is in the church. It is also why we have such an important role to play in the healing of our community. When one hurts we all hurt.

When the Ukraine is being threatened it affects each of us. When there are people losing their way, and worse, dying because of an opioid crisis, we all grieve and suffer. When a sister church is struggling for any reason all of us struggle.

If we are turning our backs on others or on ourselves, then the strength of our resources, the strength of our community, the strength of our hope and love is lost to them. If we come together and find ways in which we can strengthen our community then we are truly the church in the world.

None of this should be news to you. If it is, then may it open your heart and mind to how important your presence is in the church. The church is fully the body of Christ in the world when each unique person participates in the whole of the work that we are called to.

We are one body with many members. We are many members in one body. With your gifts, together with each others gifts, we can truly make a difference. Let's not be afraid to find out what we have to offer as individuals and as a church. Discover, be curious, be courageous and trust that you are a much-needed part of the body of Christ. You matter, and what we can do together matters. May our unity be our strength in a way that brings light, life, and love to people, to creation, and to our world.

One in the Spirit, one body in Christ, and a community of witness to the love of God for all. Amen.