

Sermon: Body Language
Text: I Corinthians 12:12-31
Date: September 19, 2010
Location: Northwest Community Church

INTRODUCTION

The human body is an amazingly complex organism. The body has 100 trillion cells, 206 bones, 600 muscles, 22 internal organs, 900 ligaments, 4000 tendons, 11 different systems like the respiratory and digestive systems that all work together. Scripture says that you are wonderfully made and that is so true.

Let's stand for just a second. Listen, did you hear that? That is the sound of your body at work. Millions of nerve signals are being sent to your muscles right now. You are using 300 muscles just to stand still and balance yourself. Now let's step in place. I feel like an aerobics instructor! It takes 40 muscles for you to lift your leg and altogether takes 200 muscles to walk. You can sit down. Let me see you all smile. You just used 17 muscles. Let me see you frown. You just used 43 muscles. Your face is full of muscles. In fact it takes 146 muscles to kiss. If you want a great workout then find someone to kiss today!

Let's all look at our biceps. Muscles can only pull on the bones. They can't push. So to straighten your arm back out you need the tricep muscle found in your underarm. Isn't God amazing to think of how he worked all of this out. I don't know about you but I have a hard time believing those that say we were formed by pure chance.

In our passage today, Paul makes a strong statement. In fact, it's a strong theological statement. He says in verse 27 that we are the body of Christ and each one of us is a part of it.

Think about that for a moment. The hands of Christ are no longer here, but we are his hands that can touch and heal. The feet of Christ are no longer here, but we are the feet that can carry good news to the world. The ears of Christ are no longer here, but we can hear the cries of the hurting and oppressed. The eyes of Christ are no longer here, but we can see those who are lost and dying without a Savior. And finally, the Holy Spirit that resided in Jesus during his time on earth we are told now lives within us.

We are One in Christ

*📖 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:15-16
Also See John 17:20-26*

Now here is where we can begin to see the absurdity of the statement we hear so often that we don't need to go to church to be a believer. Going back to verse 27, Paul writes that you are only a part of the body. You, individually are not the body of Christ.

I'm reminded of that strange character called "Thing" that was a regular character on the Adams Family TV Show. Thing was a hand in the box that would interact with characters as if it was perfectly normal.

Thing didn't have a name for a reason. You are not a body you gather with the other parts. Paul writes in verse 12 that

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

In a parallel passage in Romans 12, Paul writes:

So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. Romans 12:5

In our text today, Paul goes on to make a strong statement that is so helpful for our world today. He talks about the things that usually divide us. In his day, Jews and Greeks were divided and slave and free. In our day, black, brown, and white are divided. In our day, we are divided by whether we are democrats or republicans by whether we support Gray or Fenty. In our day, we are divided by the haves and the have nots.

Yet, we all come together as the body of Christ. And we form this new identity. But, now watch this. Jesus said in John 17 that when the world sees this new identity. When they see all of the parts coming together to form his body, the world will believe in who Jesus is.

We are Each Uniquely Made for a Purpose

 *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139: 14a, 16*

 Don't feel inferior to others and don't judge others based on your gifts.

If you are thinking that bringing together all of these different people is a recipe for problems then you would be correct. Community is wonderful but it also messy.

In the Corinthian church there were those who thought their role in the church was superior. There were those saying that they could teach better than Paul. That they were spiritually mature because of their experience of speaking in tongues. If they were comparing themselves to Paul you can imagine how they were comparing themselves to each other.

Sin is really just taking the good gifts of God, including spiritual gifts, and distorting them. I have yet to think of a sin that didn't start out as something God intended for our good but we distorted it. Our spiritual gifts can be used as weapons to make others feel inferior.

It can also make us feel superior when it comes to serving. There are just some things in the body of Christ that just need to be done. Somebody has to change the dirty diapers in the nursery and pull weeds in the yard. Somebody has to fold the worship folders and put out the coffee. The danger is that after we identify our spiritual gift we use it as an excuse not to meet the needs in our community. After you identify your primary area of service using your gifts, we also suggest that you consider a secondary area...an area that may not be your thing but you do it because you want to serve. In fact, there are still several things that we just need people with servant's hearts to do.

Then, you might be on the other side of the equation where you feel inferior because you don't have the gifts that get a lot of attention. Paul has something to say to you in a moment as well.

We are Interdependent

I love that word interdependent. It means that we are mutually dependent upon each other. Like how your muscles depend on each other one to pull this way and the other that way.

We are all needed

We might be tempted to think that there are some gifts we don't need. Like those with the gift of discernment who keep calling you out on areas you are getting off-track. But Paul warns us that we really do need every gift and every person. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19

"You are members of God's very own family...and you belong in God's household with every other Christian." Eph. 2:19 (LB)

Like a family, we really do need each other. I've discovered that yet again as I'm missing my little family this weekend!

No One is Inferior

I mentioned earlier that Paul addresses those that might feel inferior. Paul pushes this subject a step further when he talks about how God honors those who seem to go unnoticed or whose work is behind the scenes.

I love those nature shows where they are talking about the swamp or the rainforest and they begin to connect how all of the animals work together to maintain this fragile ecosystem. Like those little ants in the rainforest that chew off leaves and hoist them on their back and march in a little line. They carry those leaves back and as the leaves rot it produces a fungus that feeds the colony. As the ants flourish, so do the birds and other animals who eat them. As the birds flourish, they spread the seeds of the plants and the cycle continues. I love that because if I am walking through the forest, I just see an ant. But in the big picture that ant is so much more.

Friends, God sees the big picture. He sees how even the smallest of things fits into his plan. He sees how Josh that came out to the festival and suggested we bring a bowl for dogs to drink water created more opportunities for us to interact with dog owners in the evening shift. With dogs gathered around our festival booth, we grew even larger crowds as people interacted with the dogs. There is no insignificant work for God's Kingdom. He will take whatever efforts large and small for his glory. And in fact, he seems to bestow special honor on those willing to do the jobs that no one will ever know about. Jesus said this when speaking about saying prayers and the need to be faithful and not flamboyant.

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:6b

We suffer and celebrate together

Finally, Paul says that as a body we suffer and celebrate together.

I'm discovering this lately after I tore a ligament back at Easter. I know I've already whined to you about it! But it's only one ligament out of the 900. Logic would make me think that I could do without it... I've got 899 more! But that one ligament affected my exercise routine which affected the rest of my body. That one ligament gave me months of excuses to sit on the couch.

As we approach the Fall we'll be starting our third semester of small groups. I want to encourage you to be intentional about connecting at a deeper level. Paul writes that

We should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. I Corinthians 12:25b-26

We will all at some time or another experience deep levels of suffering. None of us wants to suffer in seclusion. We need the support and encouragement of others to make it through.

We will all at some time experience moments of celebration that we will want to share. There's nothing worse than having really good news and no one to share it with.

Here's something that we all get. You can build relationships of mutual concern, support and celebration on a few minutes contact in the church lobby. It has to come through spending intentional times with other believers. You'll be hearing the announcements coming, but even now would you just commit in your spirit that you need the support the body has to offer.

Our Ultimate Goal is not to be Gifted but to Love

 *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matthew 22:37-39*

Paul ends this passage with a review of spiritual gifts and the need for a diversity of gifts. We talked about those last week, but I want you to notice where he ends in verse 31. In fact, some Bible translations bump this passage over into chapter 13.

He says eagerly desire the greater gifts. What are the greater gifts? Didn't he just exhaust his energy explaining that no gifts are greater than others? I believe that verse 31 is really a transition sentence introducing chapter 13, the love chapter. At the end of verse 31 he says, now let me show you the most excellent way.

In the next few verses he pushes us to see not the pursuit of spiritual gifts as our aim, but rather the pursuit of love. Our goal is love. Our spiritual gifts are merely tools to accomplish that goal of love.

CONCLUSION

Can I just summarize one of the meta-narratives of Scripture? Jesus came as the ultimate example of love. When he walked this earth, he showed an incredible compassion for people – especially the least and the lost. He taught us that our ultimate aim is to love God and to love others. Then he stretched out his arms on a cross as if to say...love like this! As he breathed his last, he accomplished the ultimate act of love. He died so that we might live and be in relationship with God.

We are now that body of Christ, and our mission is to love each other and to love the least and the lost. As I read Scripture, what I see is that the Church is the place where we are called to live out the radical love of Christ. It is the place where we are called to put others before ourselves. It is the place where we are called to help grow and expand that body.

So this week, you might be the voice of Christ. You might be the hands of Christ. You might be the feet of Christ. You might be the eyes of Christ. What an incredible privilege and honor to represent the one who gave so much for all of us!

QUESTIONS