

Sermon Sunday 19th September 2021
1 Cor 12:12-31 What is the Church? A Body

Debs has helped us to see how the body needs all its parts to function at its best. It can manage without some parts, but not as well as if all the parts are working well. Paul talks about some fairly obvious parts, doesn't he? Feet, hands, ears, eyes and so on. Now, often we think of those body parts in terms of the specific roles that people play in the church – pastors and teachers, administrators, pray-ers, evangelists, musicians and so forth. And we're going to be praying later for those who have specific roles within Trinity. But I want to take us in a slightly different direction for a few minutes.

And to kick us off, we're going to have a very quick quiz about the function of some different parts that are found *inside* your body.

[Split the church into two teams, and explain I will take the first hand up that I see who hasn't already answered a question. Get it right, you earn a point for your team]

What is the function of:

- 1) Bones (give the body its shape)
- 2) Arteries and veins (take the blood around the body, and with it the oxygen, nutrients and ability to fight infection, among other things that we need)
- 3) Muscles (enable the body to move)
- 4) Nervous system (controls all that you do from breathing to eating to scratching your head, and sends messages back from the body to the brain to tell it where the body is experiencing pain or pleasure).
- 5) Lungs (enable us to breath, bringing air with enough oxygen into the body, and pushing air with too much carbon dioxide out of the body)
- 6) Intestines or bowel (extracts useful nutrients and water from food and then removes dangerous waste from the body)
- 7) Liver (many jobs, but primarily: a) cleans your blood, b) helps you digest your food by producing bile and c) it stores energy for when the body needs it)

[Declare the winning team]

So there are lots of parts of the body that we don't see, but which are absolutely vital for making the body function properly. And it's the same in the Church. There are lots of things we do, or should do as Christ's body, which may not be seen, but which really help the body to function well. Lots of these are given in the Bible as "one another" or "each other" commands. I wonder if anyone can think of any?

[Take answers, then give the remaining of the following]

- John 13:34 – As I have loved you, so you must *love* one another.
- Romans 12:10 – *Honour* one another above yourselves. (That means to respect and speak well of each other)
- Romans 12:16 – Live in *harmony* with one another.
- Romans 15:14 – *Instruct* one another.
- 1 Corinthians 1:10 – *Agree* with one another in what you say
- Galatians 5:13 – *Serve* one another humbly in love.

- Ephesians 4:32 – Be *kind* and *compassionate* to one another, *forgiving* each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- Ephesians 5:21 – *Submit* to one another out of reverence for Christ. (That is often hard to do, especially when someone is correcting us).
- Colossians 3:16 – *teach* and *admonish* one another (to admonish is to warn or to correct)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – Therefore *encourage* one another and *build each other up*.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15 – Always strive to *do* what is *good* for each other.
- Hebrews 3:13 – *Encourage* one another daily
- Hebrews 10:24 – *spur* one another on toward love and good deeds. (a spur is what a rider may have on the back of their boots, with which they give the horse a short sharp pain to urge it to put in more effort)
- James 5:16 – *Confess your sins* to each other and *pray* for each other so that you may be healed. (Sometimes God calls us to be accountable for the things we do wrong to others, so that they can help us to overcome our weaknesses)
- 1 Peter 4:9 – Offer *hospitality* to one another.
- 1 John 3:16 – we ought to *lay down our lives* for one another.

That's just a sample list – there are many more, as well as a number of things we are commanded not to do, like “provoking and envying each other” (Galatians 5:26), “lying to each other” (Colossians 3:9), or “grumbling against one another” (James 5:9). All these “each other” commands help us to grow as Christians to be more like Jesus, and they help the Gospel of Jesus Christ to spread to other people, so others can know Jesus.

And these things are so helpful to making the body of the church function well. A well-chosen encouragement can be amazingly powerful in helping someone keep going in their role in the church. Conversely, a criticism can so easily tear down. Studies have estimated that, on average, it takes five meaningful encouragements to balance out one negative criticism. In my experience, it can sometimes take even more! Likewise, offering hospitality to one another, particularly in each other's homes can be so helpful in building friendships and relationships. Or, for those who don't feel confident about cooking, treating someone to a coffee or a meal out can have the same effect. Similarly, doing *good* to one another in practical ways can be so beneficial. Kerry sent out a message this week asking for people who can pick up Gwen Smyth to bring her to Church. That's an example of doing good. Children, writing a letter to an older, lonely person in the church might be a way off doing good. These acts are like the arteries that carry the blood around the body of the church, getting all that is needed to the place where it is needed.

There are also, in that list, harder things to do, which are equally necessary. Sometimes we need to lovingly correct or challenge one another, where behaviour is not consistent with faith in Jesus. And, if corrected, usually the appropriate response is to submit to one another, so we can become more like Jesus – unless, of course, the correction is genuinely unjustified, but even then it's a good idea to submit your response to someone else who you trust who would be prepared to tell you if the criticism has some merit. But the baseline is that we are called to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This helps us grow to be more like Jesus and helps the church grow to be a more effective body. If you like, it's like the function of the intestines, removing from the body that which is not healthy for it to retain.

I want to close with one final point. I believe one of the effects of the pandemic and of not meeting together is that some of these vital unseen functions of the church have become much harder, and in places perhaps

neglected. It takes that much more effort to do good for one another, or encourage one another, or serve one another when we are physically apart. Indeed, sometimes just our presence together can itself be an encouragement. Think how much joy it gives a Godzone or YP leader, for instance, to see a group full of children or youth in front of them, instead of just a handful of children. Likewise, it brings joy to the heart to hear one another sing together.

Now, I know that we are all in different places when it comes to reengaging with life post-lockdown, and I know that there are legitimate reasons why some people still need to be at home. But I also know from talking with people, that there are those among us who have simply got out of the habit of coming to church, or who find it more convenient to sit and watch it at home. If that is you, I just want to ask you to consider not just what you prefer, but also what responsibility you have in helping the body of the *church* to function well? Is it time to consider joining together again? And if it's not, is it possible, for instance, to join the Zoom prayer meeting together? Or to choose people within the church each week to phone to keep in contact with them. The same questions actually apply to those of us who are meeting together. I may be in Church, but am I consciously encouraging others, honouring others, spurring others on to good deeds, etc.? These are the unseen functions of the body that really make a massive difference to its overall effectiveness. That's why I believe if the whole body focussed on this unseen work we would see great fruit among us for God's Kingdom. Amen?