

Sermon TUMC – September 13th, 2015 Gathering Sunday

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Psalm 19
Romans 12:1-8

We've been living an interpretation of our scriptures this morning, I hope you can feel that as well.

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

I want to give you an invitation. Take a moment to plant your feet on the ground, relax your shoulders, and close your eyes if you want.

Now pay attention to your breathing. What is moving and what is still in your body?

I invite you to choose a part of your body and consider it. It could be your tongue, or your feet, your eyebrow, toenails, your circulation or sinus system or liver.

Think about it, what does it do and how does it help the rest of the body? How does it connect to the part that is nearest? As you think about that part of your body, do you think that it gets the attention it deserves?

Take a moment to be grateful for that body part and for your body that you brought here this morning. And then return to paying attention to me – or not. ☺

The church as a body is a beautiful somewhat tired metaphor. Even Paul who wrote the book of Romans, wasn't being original. It was a metaphor from even before his time to describe different gatherings of people. And he took it on to compare the church to a living organism.

When I say church I want to be clear what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about this building. I'm talking about all of you, all of us, gathered here under the banner of followers of Jesus, lovers of God and of each other, tenders of children, protesters of injustice, prayers, players, doers, and singers of praise. *"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us."*

The point of the passage, is that "Christians are members of a body that at the same time is characterized by great diversity and great unity."¹ And I would add interdependence.

¹ John E. Toews, *Romans, Believer's Church Commentary* (Herald Press, 2004)

The Psalm that Akhlilu read to us creation is being given a body. It has a mouth that cries out and declares God's glory. We now know that creation is an ecosystem, where everything depends on each other. Sadly, we are finding that out by abusing certain parts the organism that we call the Earth.

Things don't work as separate parts; they work as a whole. So there's really no point in trying to figure out which is the most important part because the tiniest part can offset the balance for everything else. That is true for the Body of Christ as well. And so shouldn't be proud of having one function or another, and we shouldn't condescend to anyone who has a function that seems smaller in any way.

I tried for a while to talk about the different parts, and I realized that if we break up the parts and break up the functions of the church, it's like dissecting; and dissecting happens on dead bodies, so it really doesn't help to try to break up all the parts and put them back together. That's not a body. It might be a clock or a well oiled machine, but it's not a body.

At Caring Team this week we reflected on this passage together. And folks came up with some interesting observations about the church as a body.

Not surprisingly, we didn't stay with warm and fuzzies for very long. One of the first things mentioned was tension. To have a healthy body you need to have tension. It helps move our arms and muscles, or we'd all be limpy. Pressure keeps flesh on bones, and organs in their places. Pressure circulates blood and air. So when we see tension that maybe isn't a bad thing, it is what keeps us from being a floppy body that isn't anything.

Someone else mentioned an important aspect which is pain. They mentioned how people who have a disease called leprosy lose their pain sensitivity, especially on their extremities. And so they start bumping into things, or getting cut and they start losing those parts at the end because they haven't been sensitive to pain. We talked about the importance of pain. We, all know this, you might have a headache, it's easy to take a pill and make it go away, but that headache might be telling you something important about your body.

And because we are the Caring Team, we thought it would be good to mention how pain needs to be expressed and validated. Last week I mentioned an anonymous prayer request from someone suffering from depression, for instance. That kind of pain is hard to name in a large group. There's pain related to marriages that are suffering, there's pain related to lack of purpose, and all kinds of different pains that we don't have to stand up and talk about in sharing time. But as a body, lets figure out how to let the nearest part of the organism know, so that we can care properly for each other and not lose our extremities.

I also thought about how there are several parts in our bodies that are doubled up: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two kidneys, lungs, legs, arms, etc. Of course if you only looking through one eye you aren't seeing in three dimensions. You're seeing but you're not seeing in the full picture. The different eyes don't see the same thing, together when they inform the brain, they complete the picture of what is really going on. You need different perspectives. Two fingers to pick things up. Two kidneys to clear out all that waste the body also produces, one can be a backup for the other in doing some of the dirty work that no one wants to know about.

There are also silent parts of the body like an appendix or cuticles which you only hear from when it decides to create trouble for you, like appendicitis or hangnails. So lets take care of those silent parts so that they don't turn into a crisis.

Or there are the noisy parts, like when your tummy rumbles and make noise when you are trying to be quiet. Well it's actually informing you of something very important going on in your body, even when you're trying to be quiet and it won't shut up.

You can apply all of these metaphors however you want, the body image is very, very rich.

I started to wonder what kind of **body shape** that TUMC would have. I am pretty sure that we would have a very well proportioned and generous body. Because, as we all saw this morning, we are fat with gifts, with opportunities, with privilege, with care and that is such a blessing. We should pray to God that we would remain faithful in using all that in the work of Christ.

To stay in good shape, a body requires food, exercise and rest: worship, communion, service and leisure together. If a body doesn't move around, one quickly runs to check the pulse. We need movement and expression.

I will conclude with the kind of diet and exercise that the Romans passage goes on to suggest to us.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not

repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

[Conclude with You're not Alone, by Bryan Moyer Suderman]