

# Body Parts

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[ 0 : 00 ] It was Mothering Sunday and two boys burst in fairly early to their mum's bedroom and said, It's Mothering Sunday, Mum, just stay where you are.

! So they went downstairs and after a few minutes she could hear activity coming from the kitchen. The smell of bacon came wafting up the stairs and a few minutes later it all went quiet and stayed very quiet.

After about half an hour she thought perhaps she ought to kind of go down and just check everything was okay. So she did, she went downstairs, she got into the kitchen and when she got there she found her two lads both sat at the kitchen table eating bacon and eggs.

She looked at them and they looked at her and they said, Mum, it's a surprise, we're giving you the morning off. We decided to cook our own breakfast.

It's Mothering Sunday when we think about mothers, we think about Mother Church.

[ 1 : 20 ] And that story actually serves as quite a serious challenge as to what is our, what is our posture when it comes to church?

Is it something that effectively we just kind of take our bit from? We come along as passive spiritual recipients? Do we see church as something that we just go to? That we attend? As an event? An activity?

Or do we see it as, do we see the church as a living organism? And here that image of Mother Church works quite well. As that community of faith in which we grow, in which we are nurtured right through our lives.

That community in which we each have a part, in which of course we receive the blessing, but also we live out that blessing to others. And in our series, which we're looking at during Lent, we're on Ephesians 4 this week, and it just happens that this part of Ephesians happens to say quite a lot about what it looks like to live and thrive and to be Mother Church.

And it's a community that we see in that way that we see ourselves as a community that effectively looks out for one another and helps one another to grow. As Paul puts it, bearing with one another in love.

[ 3 : 00 ] It's in service to each other, in community that we grow. Not just in a way that just to one another, in an inward looking way, although that is really, really important actually.

But in an outward facing way too. God's people have always, always been formed through training. We're not born that way. And when we look at scripture, we find time and time again how God's people, both through the Old Testament and in the New, are called to a life of discipleship, which is about, if you like, training.

It's about growing. It never really stops. Because we're not born that way. When we first become followers of Jesus, we're responsive. We make a response to him.

But it's only over time, and this really is a lifelong process, that we move from being responsive to being responsible.

[ 4 : 08 ] We need to grow in order for that to happen. And it's a lifelong process. And Paul gives us that image there as he talks in verse 14 of Ephesians 4. It says, Then we will no longer be as infants.

There is this expectation, this assumption, that if you're going to follow Jesus, that is an ongoing process of growing and growing and growing.

So what does Paul say that we need to do? Well, I just want to suggest two things. I'm sure there are far more than two. But I just want to pull out two things that we see presented to us in these words from Ephesians 4.

The first thing is if we want to grow, then we have to step up and serve. There's no easy way around that one.

That's what we're called to do. But with a sense of openness. So verse 12 talks about works of service. So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith, in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature in taining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

[ 5 : 23 ] So how do we work out what it is that God is saying to each of us that he wants us to do? I don't think there's any simple, straightforward, easy answer to that. But it does call for openness in an ongoing way.

There's a story about a young man who really wanted to serve God. And he thought of all the different things he could do. And he wrote out quite a lengthy list. And felt really strongly that he needed to offer those things before God.

And so he went into a church. It was one of those, it's quite an old church that was out in the country. They never closed the building. And so he went in and because it was quite a remote place, there was nobody else there.

And so he went in and he'd set himself a good hour or so, went in to the front of that church. And he laid his list of things that he was offering God to do. And placed them out on the altar and knelt there and prayed for about an hour.

And he was expecting to come away from that experience with a sense of overwhelming joy ready to serve. And yet he just felt empty inside. So he went back home, he took his list with him and thought some more about maybe other things that he could do for God.

[ 6 : 38 ] And so he added a few more things to the list. Went back again the next weekend and did the same thing. Placed the list in front of the altar and prayed for about an hour.

And just felt even more empty. He did this a third time, adding more things to the list. He just couldn't think of anything else. We just made this list as long as he could.

It was looking like an essay. Went back on the third weekend. Again, same church, same altar. Much longer list. Put it there and prayed for two hours this time. And yet as he did so, he just felt empty.

Just couldn't get anywhere, was it? He decided to seek out the advice of a friend of his who was a Christian. He was quite a bit older than him and he really respected him for his wisdom.

He told him what he'd done. And his friend said, I'd just suggest that maybe you're going the wrong way around. Just take a fresh sheet of paper and sign your name at the bottom but write nothing else on it.

[ 7 : 45 ] Take the blank sheet, place that on the altar and pray. But to cut a long story short, that was the moment at which that young man felt renewal, felt peace, felt energy, felt clarity as to what God was asking him to do.

Now, we're all different. And that's the point in Ephesians. As Paul, you know, in Ephesians 4, Paul talks about the different things that we are gifted to do, different parts that we have within the body of Christ.

And we're all called to serve in different ways. Everybody in this room will have a different set of network of friends and contacts, family, neighbours and the rest of it. And a different combination of skills and gifts and abilities and talents and life experiences.

Every single one of us would be different. That's the point. Each one of us is important and is called to serve. But to do so with an ongoing openness to what God might be saying.

So don't ever write anything off. No matter how crazy it might seem to think somebody suggests, do you think that you might be called to do this or to that or the other?

[ 9 : 01 ] And you think, oh, I've never done that. It's not my skill set. I've never done it. Just be open. One of the amazing things about being a Christian is you never stop being taken by surprise.

And this can happen at any point in life. And you can suddenly have something open up that you never dreamt that God would use you. I've had so many people share stories like that over the years. So that's the first thing.

Paul says, you know, be ready to step up and serve, but to do so with a sense of openness. Works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith, in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The second thing, as I say, there will be many more, but I only just want to draw attention to these two this morning. The second thing I want to suggest Paul draws our attention to here is the importance of encouragement to one another.

Verse 15, Paul talks of speaking the truth in love. Paul's not talking about just simply massaging one another's egos, just being nice to each other.

[10:19] You know, there is a place for challenge. To speak the truth in love might mean that we have to be willing to say and hear difficult things from time to time.

Let's not forget that. We urge to encourage. And remember, he talks about speaking truth in love. And even when there are difficult things to be said to each other, it must always be underpinned by love. And I want to suggest that particularly, particularly, and this is true in every church, in every gathering, in every generation, there is always a responsibility upon us to encourage those who are younger than us.

However young we might be, or however old we might be, ours is the responsibility to the next generation. That's biblical. It's the story of an artist, a world-famous artist, and he was visited one day in his studio.

There was a knock on the door. And he opened the door, and there was an elderly gentleman standing on his doorstep, and he had lots of what appeared to be paintings kind of gathered up, wrapped up in some rags.

[11:52] He said, forgive me for troubling you, but would you mind if I showed you some of my paintings? Because I'd really value your opinion as a professional artist on what I've produced.

Well, the artist was a little bit puzzled by this. He wasn't expecting him, but he thought he may as well invite him in. It felt like the polite thing to do. So he invited him into the studio, and this man placed this bundle on top of the table and began to unwrap it and took the paintings out and placed them on the table for the artist to look at.

And as the artist looked at them, he was trying really hard to think how he could say something positive, because deep down inside, he knew these paintings were okay, but they certainly weren't sellable.

And so he said something that went a bit like this. He said, these paintings, I can see you've travelled some way to come and see me. Thank you for that. That's an honour. That's a privilege.

And I can see how this work is very much your own.

I can see how what you've produced here has got your personality all over it, and that makes it unique to you, and it's so special.

[13:06] And in that respect, this work is priceless. If you were to be seeking to market your work, I'd suggest that maybe there are some technicalities about it that would suggest that it probably wouldn't be of a lot of monetary value.

However, these paintings are really special because you created them. The only man could understand everything that was trying to be said.

He thanked the artist and packed up his paintings and was just about to go. When he said, actually, just one other thing, I wondered if I could show you. He reached into his bag and he brought out a very, very old-looking sketchbook.

He said, would you mind just taking a look at these? The artist opened the book and went through these, what appeared to be some very old-looking pencil drawings.

The artist looked at them and said to the man, now these are really good. In fact, these are bordering on outstanding. Whoever actually produced these, if they could just be encouraged to develop the potential that I can see there, I think they could easily have it within them to be a professional artist.

[14:36] They're quite outstanding. It's at that point, and only at that point, that the old man began to weep. He explained that these were his own drawings from when he was a boy.

When he learned the love of drawing, sketching and painting, and no matter whenever he showed them to anybody, they just sort of shrugged it off and told him to do something else.

Let's never forget the potential that lies in all of us, but particularly those who are younger, who are in childhood and in their teens, and the onus that is on each and every one of us to seek to encourage the very best in them.

But that ministry of encouragement doesn't stop there. That ministry of encouragement to speak the truth in love that we may grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head,

that is Christ, is an everyday, ongoing, lifelong challenge.

You know, often it's easy to meet somebody and to just assume that they've had plenty of encouragement because they're so good at what they do. But never make that assumption.

[16:08] It may be that that person needs your encouragement right there and right then.

So let's encourage one another that we might grow in faith and flourish in him. Today is Mothering Sunday and I'd like to encourage us as we come to pray now I'd like to encourage us to pray in a number of different ways and I'm really aware that for all sorts of different reasons this can be a difficult day.

And so as we do the prayers in a moment I'd like to leave it as wide open as possible. There's going to be some there are some candles here. There's going to be some music playing. And in your own time I'd like to invite you to come forward and to light a candle to express whatever type of prayer you feel led to pray this morning.

It may be a prayer of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for a mum Thanksgiving for children.

but it may well be that actually lighting that candle this morning is an expression of lament. It may be that that symbol of lighting that candle and the light is a reminder of a situation that you know of right now where the light of hope needs to shine in a situation of darkness.

[17:47] it might be that there's a particular mum that you know that is struggling right now. It might be a prayer of lamentation.

But whatever type of prayer it is that you wish to bring this morning God is here God is among us and I invite you to come forward and to light a candle and to pray.

I'm going to ask the music team if you could get ready. Let's pray together. Lord thank you for the gift of one another in the church.

And thank you that you call each and every one of us to be a part of that. Help us always to be ready to step up and serve and to be open to hear your voice calling us into situations of service that we might not be expecting.

And Lord may we always be poised and ready to encourage one another. Lord as we give you thanks for the life of the church so we pray this day on this mothering Sunday for mums throughout the world and we bring you our prayers now in the name of Jesus.

[19:30] Amen. to be Thank you.