

One Body, Many Parts

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- [0 : 0 0] For preachers, it's sometimes difficult to decide what the topic is for a given Sunday. And so the church, not just the Church of Scotland, but lots of different churches have what's called the lectionary.
- And the lectionary goes through the Bible in three year cycles. And it's really good because it does avoid preachers getting on a hobby horse.
- And just trotting out the same favourite passage week after week. So you can't avoid tackling the more awkward passages.
- And you can't avoid the passages that perhaps don't suit you and perhaps don't fit your hobby horse. So when I was thinking about what we were going to look at today, I went and had a look to see what the lectionary readings were.
- And I found 1 Corinthians 12. A picture of the body. Now, I think some people might think this is one of my hobby horses.
- [1 : 1 5] But it's a picture that Paul paints that gives us a really strong image of what it means to be the church. Because the body has so many different parts and so many different systems.
- If you think about it, our digestive system is how we get nourishment to all the muscles and the parts of our body. And the blood carries the oxygen and the nutrients to all the parts of our bodies.
- And our nerves communicate between... You prick your finger and you feel pain because the nerve has sent the impulse to your brain.
- It's an amazing, amazing system. We breathe. We breathe in oxygen. That brings up life-giving breath into our bodies.
- And then our heart pumps the blood round. And we've got kidneys which keep our blood clean. We've got eyesight. So that we can see where we're going and not bump into things.
- [2 : 2 0] Also, so that we can read. Isn't that amazing? We have a mouth. Again, to help us with that breathing. But it also helps us eat.
- And to speak. We have ears. Which are great for hearing. But they're also a vital part of our balance. If you've got an ear infection, very often you feel dizzy.
- And walking straight is difficult. You've got hands and arms to grasp and to hold. We've got legs and feet. We've got legs and feet. So we can move and walk and run.
- And each bit is dependent on the other. A couple of years ago, my hip was damaged. And the other leg had to carry an awful lot of the heavy work, as it were.
- But my back was affected. My neck was affected. Everything was affected because my hip was out. So we need all parts of our bodies.
- [3 : 2 4] We're somewhat disabled. Now I know people living with disability can do amazing things.

I'm a great fan of the Paralympics and I watch it coveredly but just because people can overcome difficulties doesn't mean that those difficulties are an ideal situation and as we've seen each part has a distinct job to do and each part contributes to the whole end of the biology lesson and over to a bit of theology like every healthy body sorry, like a healthy body the church, both locally, nationally and globally is all interconnected we've seen that when scandals break in one denomination all denominations tend to get tarnished there is that interconnectivity not just in Christ but in the popular mind there's a Yorkshire saying that if you kick one they'll all limp and now that really should be a description of the church there should be that closeness that if one of us is hurt if one of us is being kicked we're all affected so

I think to address a concern that I know people have been living with for the last few months with Brian's illness you are right to feel concerned it's a Christian response Brian is if you like he's received that injury and we should be limping with him we should be feeling the same sort of pain but you know it's a medical issue and because of medical confidentiality it's not appropriate for us to talk about what's wrong with Brian we can't discuss his condition and I just want to think how would I feel if something that was wrong with me was being discussed far and wide mulled over by everybody and chewed over and now I know those in church will want to do that to pray but out in the wider community that just becomes gossip and you wouldn't want your medical history gossip about in the wider community

I'm sure I wouldn't but as his brothers in Christ as his brothers and sisters we must be praying for Brian and his family we need to be asking God to bring healing and wholeness to them and for him to work in his sovereign way so that when Brian feels fit to return he'll be in that right place but he'll still need our prayers and as he's been off a considerable time he won't resume all his duties at once it'll be what's called the phased return and this is something that is quite normal when people are off for a long time but we pray for that day when he is back when he is fully restored and he has all the energy and enthusiasm that people have told me he's brought to this congregation let's get back to the bible

Paul writes to the church in Corinth it's a church that's experiencing problems there are factions one is saying I follow Paul another I follow Apollos another I follow Cephas that's Peter still another I follow Christ it's not Paul's church it's not Apollos' church it's not Peter's church it's God's church and that's why Paul writes this letter to that church Christ is not divided and so to get this point over Paul gives the church in Corinth a picture of the body he tells them that they are the body of Christ we are the body of Christ a living entity just like a body is and the body of Christ has Christ at the head since we all believe in Jesus there can only be one body and we enjoy that relationship between Christ and the church just in the same way as a head and a body are in relationship

[8 : 53] Paul affirms that Jesus is the head of the church but it is his church that we're all here to serve him we need to follow him we need to listen to him we need to let Christ guide us and lead us just as the head guides and dictates to the body what it needs to do but the picture of a body also describes the diversity that is within in the church and this is good this isn't a bad thing we are not all expected to be clones we all bring something different so all these many parts of the body are mutually interdependent and as we've seen a body needs so many parts to be healthy the church needs all the gifts all the talents and all the skills that you have to function properly we need each other and in a sense that makes us vulnerable we don't like to feel beholden to somebody we don't like to feel needy we don't like to have to ask others for help to rely on others we want to be independent

I know I do I hate asking for help and when I had my bad hip there were things that I knew I couldn't do and I had to ask for help and I hated it hated every minute of it but within the church there are things that we cannot do we're not meant to do no one person is meant to do everything we are meant to rely on others to take their responsibility and to do their bits that leads us to having to trust them to trust somebody else that they're going to do their bits and they're going to have to do it without us manoeuvring or controlling or manipulating we're going to have to trust that God will show them what they need to do in the same way he's showing us we can't say well

I'm close to God therefore God tells me everything that I need to do but he also tells me what you've got to do too that's not the way it works we have to trust that everybody is listening to God and everybody is hearing what is being said for them to contribute to the body as a whole we have to have that trust in one another I think Paul explains it best in a couple of verses from what we've heard read to us this morning if the ear should say because I'm not an eye I do not belong to the body it would not for that reason stop being part of the body if the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be if the whole body were an ear then where would the sense of smell be but in fact God has placed the parts of the body every one of them just as he wanted them to be just as he wanted them today each believer is valuable to the church and each of us is needed this diversity is really something that we should celebrate and we should recognise it as a gift from

God as he has designed his church some of us will be eyes to see his vision for the church and to see the need in the world and to make that known others of us might be more like ears hearing his voice and also hearing the voice of the oppressed and the vulnerable some of us might be like arms to hug and to hold those who just need that touch and that support some of us might be like hands with gifts of creativity to make things some of us might be like feet to bring the message of God's good news remember that song how lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who bring good news and there are organs of reproduction that help the church grow through witness and lifestyle organs of digestion that feed us in the faith

Jesus might no longer be physically present but he is spiritually with us spiritually present in his people and present in the world through his people as believers we need to work together to accomplish the mission that Christ has given his church to go into the world and make disciples so how does the body hold together well physically you've got tendons and ligaments for the church I believe it's the fruits of the spirit we've sung bind us together with cords of love bind us together so it's love that is one of the binding agents as we are loved by God so our love for him in return should spill over into loving each other loving our neighbours as ourselves and if we were just to read into the next chapter in that letter to the church in Corinth we'd be into chapter 13 and I think the words of chapter 1 Corinthians 13 are just so familiar that wonderful passage on what love is love is patient love is kind it does not envy it does not boast it is not proud it is not rude it is not self-seeking it is not easily angered it keeps no record of wrongs love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth it always protects always trusts always hopes always perseveres and so much more so love was something that Paul was telling that problematic church in Corinth they needed more of and I think we all need wherever we are to take stock of what love really is the fruit of the spirit is joy we can take shared joy in good times together we can also take joy in our shared forgiveness that our sins are forgiven that the slate is wiped clean we have new life in Christ wow what can give us more joy than that the fruit of the spirit is peace what binds us together should be a place of refuge from the worries of life a peaceful place a place where we can have our strength renewed it's patience giving each other the space we need when we have different views and different opinions not being quick to think that my way is the right way and everybody has got to toe the line with me but having that patience to gently coach and encourage people along the fruit of the spirit is kindness kindness you know that's the children's word of the year

[18 : 02] I found out this week on the television and if children know if kids know we need more kindness in the world then they'll not go far wrong that quality of being caring of being helpful kindness puts others at the centre and then there's goodness that's about having positive characteristics such as honesty empathy generosity and integrity goodness has an active sense about it it's about going the extra mile when somebody's in need and they ask you to do something do that and something else for them faithfulness about sticking to Jesus sticking to the gospel being faithful to what we believe but it's also about being faithful to one another about standing up for each other and gentleness about not demanding our own way but again that going back to kindness gentleness is about putting others first having others at the centre and finally self control when we're exasperated frustrated angry we need to control it now these are all characteristics that the

Holy Spirit grows within us they don't come naturally and I'm not saying this isn't a list of New Year's resolutions for you to go away and try and pull yourself up by your boot straps and improve yourself in all these departments that is not the message of the fruit of the Spirit the fruit of the Spirit is to rely on Jesus to get close to him to get close to God and then these things get produced in our lives not by our activities but by the activities of the Holy Spirit but there is a little element the one if you see these things being developed in us and we can see them in others like a body needs to exercise we need to exercise these characteristics we need to put them into practice they're not just for the mind they're for the doing so there might be a little bit of physiotherapy involved as well a little bit of doing these things that that powerful love that exists between us and

God and us and each other is a really powerful testimony particularly when people outside the church look in and see Christians from such a diversity of backgrounds of ages of all people from everywhere actually loving each other actually putting themselves out for each other that speaks volumes and back in the second century there was a chap called Tertullian and he wrote look how they in brackets the Christians love one another and how they are ready to die for each other that was something that was amazing that people saw in the Christian community a love for each other that would have gone to the point of death under persecution salvation you know

Jesus raises the bar even further we have a lot in common because we know the Lord Jesus says love your enemies do good to those who hate you bless those who curse you pray for those who mistreat you someone slaps you on one cheek turn to them the other also someone takes your coat don't hold your shirt from them give to anyone who asks and if anyone takes what belongs to you do not demand it back do to others as you would have them do to you that love isn't just a warm cozy feeling of fellowship over a cup of tea that is challenging love that is a love that goes beyond what we can work up for ourselves this is fruit of the spirit love and

I'd just like to finish with some more words of Jesus if you love those who love you what credit is that to you even sinners love those who love them and if you do good to those who are good to you what credit is that to you even sinners do that and if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment what credit is that to you even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid in full but love your enemies do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back be merciful just as your father is merciful amen