

Easter People: We Are the Body Sunday, 5/29/22

Last week we encouraged each other to keep practicing our salvation, working out our faith by growing in holiness of heart and life. Easter People must show the visible results of our salvation to the world if we expect to be the salt and the light Jesus calls us to be.

Today, we revisit something we've all heard countless times but often failed to let shape our attitudes and actions: We are the many parts of the one Body of Christ.

Have you ever wondered how many parts the human body has? Our bodies are made up of approximately 37 trillion cells and over 200 different types of cells.¹ Infants have around 270 bones, which reduces to about 206 in adulthood as some of those bones fuse together.² There are 78 organs in the human body, unless you count each tooth and bone separately, in which case the total would be 315 organs. There are over 600 muscles in the human body³, four basic types of tissue,⁴ and eight major blood types.⁵ So technically, if we wanted to push Paul's analogy of the Church as Christ's Body even further, there are great many more parts than just those large anatomical features he mentions, like hands, feet, eyes, and ears.

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians is simple. Each of us is one of many comprising the Body of Christ. As Easter People, we have to find the balance of not thinking too little of ourselves or thinking too much of ourselves. Instead, we need to find our places in the Body and simply be who God created us to be, living for the common good of the entire body.

When I was in high school, my friend skippered a J-Boat for races in the Upper Minnetonka Yacht Club. Even though I knew next to nothing about sailing, he would occasionally call me at the last minute to ask if I'd crew for a race. I told him he should find a more experienced sailor, but he explained that very little sailing skill was required. My role on the boat was to be "live ballast." When it looked like it was going to be too windy on the lake for him to handle the boat with just two people, he'd invite me to be the third, to help keep the boat sailing on its side without tipping over, thereby reducing the drag of the water

¹ https://www.nature.com/scitable/blog/bio2.0/discovering_new_cell_types_one/

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK537199/>

³ <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/21887-muscle>

⁴ <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/imagepages/8682.htm>

⁵ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/218285>

and speeding up the boat. That's what he needed ballast for. He needed "live ballast" because the wind on a lake never stays the same, and the course of the boat changed with every tack and jibe, so he needed ballast that could get up and move when he shouted the command to do so. My other main job was to stay out of the way when a person or the boom of the boat came flying across the hull.

Not a very glorious role to play in a sailing race, right? But without my extra 150 pounds on board, he couldn't have sailed in the race. That's part of what Paul was talking about when he wrote, "I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less."⁶ Being one out of many doesn't make us any less important, because, as Paul notes, "God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it."⁷

Each one of you is one of many different parts of the Body of Christ. It doesn't matter how much attention, honor, or thanks you get from playing your part. God has created and called you to be the person you are, and without you playing your part in the Church, the Body isn't complete. We can only win the race when we have the whole crew in place. There is no such thing as an unimportant member of this congregation.

Where do you fit into the body? Some of you have established that through many years of service to the church and communities you live and work in. Some of you have discovered that God has called you to different roles at different times, and that it's OK to fit in one way for a season and then try something new. Some of you need to become less-active parts of the body of Christ as your own body and mind slows down and needs more rest. Some of you have let your spiritual muscles atrophy due to lack of service exercise. And still others of you may think that you really don't have anything to offer the church that someone else can't do better.

If you've been baptized into the Christian faith, then you do have an essential part to play. That's part of the meaning of baptism. Paul calls baptism saying "goodbye to our partial and piecemeal lives... each of us...now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain- his spirit."⁸ Easter People recognize their part in the resurrection

⁶ 1Corinthians 12:14. *The Message*.

⁷ 1Corinthians 12:18. *Ibid*

⁸ 1Corinthians 12:13. *Ibid*

body of Christ, the Church, and actively seek out ways to use their gifts to strengthen the Body and its ministries.

Paul goes on in his letter to say why we shouldn't let ourselves get a big head over the roles God has given us. I'm continuing our earlier reading from 1Corinthians 12, beginning with verse 19 in the Message paraphrase. {Read 1Cor 12:19-27}

Do you remember Terry Gilliam's giant foot that was a regular animated feature of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*? I can't help thinking of that very foot when Paul writes that a giant body part wouldn't be a body, but a monster.⁹ In the *Monty Python* animations, whenever the giant foot appears, something gets unceremoniously squashed. That's not God's vision for the Body of Christ, but it's not far from describing what can happen when some parts of the Body are valued above others, or when some parts of the Body are excluded because they're not like the others. Diversity of thinking and background isn't a threat to the Body, it's what gives the Body strength. And yet, increasing in our country, the hands are separating themselves from the feet, and the eyes from the ears, because our politics don't align, our ideas about human sexuality differ. We even still pull the body apart over things like our musical preferences and whether or not it's ok to drink coffee in the sanctuary. That's tragic. When we divide the Body over superficial things like these it's a sad denial of the unity of the Spirit that we were baptized into, and the net result is that people, churches, and the Holy Spirit are trampled underfoot.

Thankfully, God hasn't given up on us, and God's Spirit continues to work through Christ's body. I don't normally like to compare the Body of Christ to a machine, but I like the way the gears in this picture suggest the idea of interdependency: Any movement of one gear introduces movement to another.

Dependency has become a dirty word in our culture, but Paul lifts it up as a hallmark of what a healthy church looks like. This has two implications. The first is that when any one person hurts, regardless of the part they play in the Body, everyone else in the church is "involved in the hurt, and the healing."¹⁰ That's why ministries like the prayer chain, Befrienders, frozen meals and meal trains, cards, and calls are so crucial to the health of our

⁹ 1Corinthians 12:19. Ibid

¹⁰ 1Corinthians 12:26. Ibid

church. That's why we gather for funerals and so frequently share meals on those occasions. Whenever we pause in our day to attend to the hurt of another part of the Body, we are exercising our muscles as Easter People.

The second implication of our interdependency in the Body is whenever one person grows, thrives, or celebrates, the entire Body has cause for joy.¹¹ That's why we gather for fellowship after church. We can get coffee and cookies just about anywhere, but this is the only place we can gather to share pictures of grandchildren or our latest gardening project with each other in the context of our morning worship. It's why we'll be asking our graduating senior high students to stand before our congregation on June 12 to be recognized and prayed for. It's why we gather for weddings, confirmation parties, and baptism celebrations. We have a need to celebrate together, because whenever one of us has cause for celebration, the joy is magnified and shared when the church gathers.

In a few minutes, we'll be thanking God for the gifts given over the last year as memorials to the saints who have gone on to be with the Lord, all of whom found their place in the Body of Christ and made it richer by doing so. Their race has been run, but the rest of us still have a part to play in the Body of Christ in this life. Have you found your part? Have you exercised those spiritual muscles recently? Maybe it's time for you to try something new, or to accept for the first time that you really are a necessary part of the Body. It doesn't matter that it's the end of May. The Body of Christ doesn't hibernate over the summer, although we do enjoy our summer vacations and travel! Every person who still draws breath has a part to play, because no part alone can form the Body, and the Body is never complete without all the parts.

Please take some time now to reflect on your part in the Body. How are you affirming your role(s)?

¹¹ Ibid



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