

SERMON TITLE: "The Body of Christ"  
SERMON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: July 8, 2018, at First UMC

## **INTRODUCTION**

Have any of you been to a doctor's office this week? Or spent time talking with someone who has? My husband Steve and I have noticed that as we're aging, we're becoming more aware of what's going on, or not going on, in our bodies. The older we get, the more time we spend thinking about and talking about our aches and pains. But body fascination isn't just a middle- or old-age phenomenon. When our kids were young, it seemed like an awful lot of our family conversations had to do with bodily functions. I recall one book that Grandma James sent for us to read to our kids. The children's book made the point that, even though we'd prefer to avoid it, even flatulence is normal for the human body.

Of course, the norms and mysteries of the body are extensive. An anatomy book could teach us about bones and muscles and show us pictures of where our various organs reside. Detailed pictures might even show how nerve synapses fire, sending messages from our brain to our fingers and toes. Some of you here this morning could point to some non-human parts in your bodies due to knee replacements and artificial hips—all of which provide you a better quality of human life.

A science article I read this week got even more detailed. It indicated that our "human gut is home to . . . approximately 100 trillion bacteria cells" which outnumber our human cells by about ten times. "The microorganisms present in the gut are mainly bacteria and belong to more than 1000 species."<sup>1</sup> It's like there's a whole ecosystem of diverse creatures living inside our intestinal tract, most of them helping us to digest our food and allowing us to fight off infections and be healthy. Many of us have learned the hard way what happens when we take a dose of antibiotics that kills off those many beneficial bacteria. Just like we need a lot of different organs to be healthy, we also need the vast variety of microorganisms that inhabit our body.

The Apostle Paul was no microbiologist, but he apparently knew enough about the human body to use it as a metaphor for how we are connected together as Christians. In our reading from First Corinthians 12, let's see what we can learn about the body of Christ.

### **1—THE BODY OF CHRIST IS ONE BODY**

The Apostle Paul begins his description by saying that the body of Christ is one unit or one body. In verses 12 and 13, Paul says, sure, the body has many parts, but first and foremost it is one body of Christ. That basic truth comes from the fact that we all worship the one same God and we have been baptized by the one same Spirit. As the old hymn proclaims, "the Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord."

Without our faith in Jesus, we'd just be a bunch of people with little in common. We come from different neighborhoods. We work at different jobs. We go to different schools. We eat at different restaurants. We watch different programs on TV. We listen to different musicians. We have different hobbies and skills. We take vacations to different places. We get excited about or angry about different political actions.

Without our common faith, we'd have no particular reason to gather here in this place. But because we have been drawn together by our salvation through Jesus Christ, we have a similar experience and a common purpose. We are united in our spiritual hopes and expectations. We are connected in our collective efforts of mission outreach and spiritual growth. We are all focused on our calling to offer Christ's mercy to each other and to the world. In these most important aspects of our lives, we are one body.

This week, I gathered electronic signatures from United Methodist clergy all over our state. From Brigham City and Ogden in the north to Price in the east to St. George in the south and back to Salt Lake City and its suburbs; Anglo, Tongan, and Asian; ordained elders, licensed local pastor, and district superintendent; actively serving and retired--from our diverse locations and perspectives, we 14 United Methodist clergy added our names to a letter composed by the Episcopalian and Catholic bishops of Utah.

The clergy of those and other Christian denominations have been doing likewise. Despite the fact that we worship in different places and have some different theological perspectives, we are coming together in the name of Jesus, to stand united on a cause that we believe is important to our Savior and Healer. We Christian clergy are functioning as one because we believe in the one same Christ who cares about the health of all our human bodies and who holds us together in his one body of Christ.

## **2—THE BODY OF CHRIST HAS MANY IMPORTANT PARTS**

OK, so the body of Christ is one body. But, as we read in verse 14 and following, it is also made up of many important parts. Those parts are unique and special. They each have an essential gift and function that should not be discounted or denied. I've always loved how Paul describes this. Can you imagine a foot or an ear speaking up to say that it doesn't belong to the body because it isn't as important as a hand or an eye? Or can you imagine a whole body that was just one big shoulder? Or can you picture just a head rolling around with no feet?

Paul is concerned about those people who deny the gifts that God has given them. He's trying to correct the false thinking of those who erroneously assume that others are more important than they are. And Paul is also trying to correct the false thinking of those who mistakenly assume that they are more important than other people are. No, says Paul. No one is more important or less important. Everyone has an important job to do. Everyone has an important role to fill. Everyone's gifts are needed for the healthy functioning of the whole.

A couple weeks ago, my husband and I went to see the movie *Incredibles 2*. While I would say that I enjoyed the original movie more, I liked how *Incredibles 2* expanded the world of superheroes to include more characters with a lot of unique and varied super skills—which can all come in handy when used for a good purpose. Even within the one family of Bob and Helen Parr there's a big variety of talents. Mr. Incredible is amazingly strong. His wife Elastigirl is super stretchy. Their daughter Violet can protect herself and others with an invisible force field. Their son Dash can run so fast you can't even see him sometimes.

And their baby Jack-Jack is bursting out with so many different kinds of powers that it isn't yet clear how he will develop. Maybe in 10 years, there'll be an *Incredibles 3* that will show who Jack-Jack has become.

The point of the *Incredibles* stories is that we each have our important purpose. Sure, we might have to train our talents and become grateful for and gracious with our gifts. Yes, we might have to learn to use our powers for good and not harm. Certainly, we might have to overcome our insecurities and doubts, so we can stand up and use our special senses. Just like, other times, we might have to humble our high and mighty tendencies, so we can learn from the wisdom and benefit from the benevolence of others. In the body of Christ, every part is important—not just them, and not just us. The well-being and functionality of the whole is dependent on every part doing its thing, just as God designed it. And no one can say that isn't true.

Thinking about animated films caused me to remember another one called *Happy Feet*. I saw it many years ago with my son. *Happy Feet* is a story about Emperor Penguins that live in Antarctica. Specifically, it's a story about one young penguin who doesn't fit in with his peers. Mumble, as his parents have named him, is developmentally delayed. Mumble doesn't grow up as fast as all the other little penguins. And when they all go off to singing school, Mumble is the only young penguin who can't find his song. Mumble's singing is so bad, in fact, that the other penguins tell him to be quiet. Instead of singing, Mumble's gift is dancing. From the moment he was born, he had happy feet that could hardly keep from tapping out a rhythm. But, because he is different, Mumble becomes a social outcast.

Fortunately, as Mumble travels, he finds some other friends and seeks some other adventures. He questions why the fish supply has dwindled, and he bravely pursues an opportunity to rescue his penguin relatives from starvation. In so doing, it's his different ability of dancing that gets Mumble noticed by humans who can help solve the environmental problem that has put the fish supply in jeopardy. It's Mumble's unique gift that brings hope to his Emperor Penguin colony. And, it's his special dancing talent that captures the heart of Gloria, the best girl singer of all the penguins. By the end of the movie, the

penguin who was considered a handicapped social outcast becomes known as the differently-abled hero who saves the day.

I suppose most of us have felt like Mumble sometimes. We feel like we don't belong, or that we don't have anything of value to contribute. But you never know when the time will come when your unique talent or perspective will be exactly what's needed, and might even save the day. And that's true for all the other parts of the body, as well. The more we recognize and honor diversity in ourselves and in others, the more creative and healthy we'll all become. The one body of Christ has many important parts.

### **CONCLUSION**

Yesterday morning I heard a radio interview of a young woman who just became a Catholic nun. Before that, she played professional women's football for four years. She was a fullback who "stood behind the quarterback and hit people the whole game." As she reflected on her experiences in football, Sister Rita Clare said that her Detroit Demolition team brought together women from all different backgrounds. They wouldn't have ever been together except for their common desire to play that sport. The radio interviewer asked the young woman if her football experience added anything to her life now as a nun. Yes, said Sister Rita Clare, absolutely. The teamwork skills she gained in sports were definitely a plus for becoming unified in purpose with the other nuns in her Franciscan order. But, Sister Rita Clare also explained, even our difficult life experiences form our identity and shape us into the various people whom God calls to Christian faith and ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, indeed. We Christians are unique, interesting, and gifted. There are many important members in the one body of Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.eufic.org/en/healthy-living/article/the-role-of-gut-microorganisms-in-human-health>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.npr.org/2018/07/07/626800491/pro-athlete-to-nun>