

1Cor. 12:12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

November 13, 2016

You Are the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

You are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part.

I have to tell you that, if I made a list of the aspects of our faith in which there is doubt and uncertainty, this idea would be on that list. I can see it in people's eyes when we talk about it. Just not feeling it. It doesn't resonate in most of us.

I'm not sure of the reason why. We know what it means to be part of a body, to belong to something greater than ourselves, to want to make a difference by offering whatever we can for that greater cause. On this Veterans Day weekend, those of you who are veterans know better than most all of us what it means to be a part of something bigger than yourself, in which you play an important part, and the rest of your group needs you to do your part.

If you've been on a team playing a sport, you know this. Or playing in a band or orchestra, or danced with a dance company. Others depend on you doing your part and you live up to that expectation. And it feels so good to have done your part to make the team better, or the music richer, or the performance more beautiful.

So, in spite of our reputation for being individualistic, most all of us know what it means to be a part of something bigger and more important than ourselves. So, I don't think that's the reason we don't go all in on this.

Maybe it's because we don't always realize the full impact we have on the rest of the Body. The truth is that we have a greater impact on the Body of Christ than we realize. For instance, having a kidney transplant has helped me learn a lot about what your kidneys do in your body. You know that kidneys filter out the impurities and waste in our body, but did you know they also monitor the amount of water in our bodies – if you drink lots of water, they take out more; if you don't drink much, they reduce the amount the body gets rid of to keep the right balance; they monitor your blood pressure – if it starts getting lower, they release proteins to increase it; they regulate the production of red blood cells in the body and actually tell your bone marrow to make more if there aren't enough. They do a lot more than we think they do.

In the same way, we have a greater impact on the people around us than we realize. We don't just add to the number of people in the pews on Sunday, we support the people who have come to worship with us. When we affirm our faith, there may well be someone around us whose faith is struggling, and hearing us saying what we believe may just carry them through and lift up their faith. Sometimes we talk as though some people are leaders and others are followers, but the truth is, we are all leaders, because what we do, or don't do, has an impact on what the people around us do or fail to do. When you respond to calls for help with projects in the church, that doesn't just get the work done – as important as that is – you also encourage those working on that project.

You are a part of something much bigger than yourself. You have a role to play, and that role is bigger than you realize. Consider for a moment your toes. They may seem to be relatively unimportant. But try walking sometime without using your toes. It's hard to get much forward movement without them pushing against the ground to move you forward. Try standing still, holding your toes off the floor, and see how long it takes until you lose your balance. Even toes have a purpose, a role to play and when they don't do what they're supposed to, the whole body is affected.

So, I admit that, once I started looking into these things, I got a little carried away, but, this is fascinating stuff. Consider the fingernail. Fingernails not only help you hold on to small objects, they also let you know when there's a more serious health issue in your body. And, do you know those cuticles at the base of your nails that you're always having to push back? They are there for a reason: they cover the the area where your nails are growing so that bacteria and dirt can't enter the body.

Every part of the body has a purpose, a role to play, and very often the parts of our body do more than we realize. The same is true for you and the church, the Body of Christ. You have a part to play, and your role is bigger than most of us realize.

I'm afraid the main reason we don't seem to be all in on the idea that Paul tells us here in First Corinthians twelve, is that we don't really believe it is true. It may be the same reason why a lot of people didn't believe Jesus himself was the Son of God – he was a physical average-looking man. A carpenter's son who looked like everyone else. They just couldn't see beyond that to his true identity. Maybe it's the same thing with the church as the Body of Christ. We're just average-looking people. As an organization, the church seems similar to lots of other organizations. If you've been on a committee, you

know what I'm talking about. It's hard to see through those things and see the church's true identity: the Body of Christ. But it is. We are.

The Body of Christ is an amazing thing – even more amazing than the body you walk around in every day. It stands up for truth, works for justice, speaks the Word of God, has a heart for the poor, breathes the Holy Spirit into others, heals broken relationships, and shines light in the darkness of the world's pain. That's a cause greater than yourself.

Whether you are the heart or the lungs, the toes or the cuticles of the fingernails, you have a purpose and a calling and a part to play in the work of Jesus Christ in the world, and, like those body parts, your role is greater than you think, with impacts beyond what you know. And, if you do not do your part, you have a greater negative impact than you realize. When you don't take your kids to Sunday school, not only do they not learn, but it becomes discouraging to the teachers who take the time prepare a lesson, and it affects the other kids who do come because they may be the only ones in the class...

When we don't give financially to the work of the church, we are failing to support Jesus in his work through the church. That's big. If we believe the church is not just another organization, but the Body of Christ, our failure to support the work of the church is a failure to support the work of Christ. But it's even more than that. We discourage those who do support that work. You frustrate the ministries that want to lift up the beaten down. You give the finance committee indigestion.

But, when we bring our pledges up here, we encourage the rest of the body to do the same, we empower our leaders to plan for the coming year. We open the way for this church to join with other churches in housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, offering a church home for those who need a family of faith. You impact the Body of Christ in more ways than you know. You help to provide a thin place, where the boundary between earth and heaven thins and people since the closeness of God, encounter the power of God's love, give themselves to the Body of Christ. You provide a church family that loves and supports each other in good times and bad. As Paul says, when one suffers, all suffer and when one rejoices we all rejoice.

Church membership isn't about the numbers – it's about saying yes to Jesus' call on your life.

Stewardship isn't about meeting the budget – it's about saying yes to Jesus' call on your life.

If you are doing your part, you are part of something much bigger than you realize, and you are doing much more than you know.

If you are not doing your part, you are not just making it harder for us to do God's work, you are saying no to Jesus' call on your life – time, talents and treasure.

You are a member of the Body of Christ, and you have gifts and functions you don't even know about. The Spirit of Christ lives in each one of us, connecting us to each other in ways we don't even imagine. Unfortunately, failing to offer our time, talent and treasure have a greater negative impact that we realize. But, when we support each other, and work together, and offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure, we become part of a cause much greater than ourselves – the salvation and restoration of the world; and our gifts do more than we realize. They display the love of God and invite others into relationship with God; they offer hope to those in despair, love to those who feel unlovable, and eternal life to those who fear that death is a wall instead of a doorway.

Kidneys or cuticles, we are all together the Body of Christ, each and every one of us.