

“The Body is a bundle of careful compromises”^{1 2}

- Quick confession- I found that quote on a quote website from a book called *Why we Get Sick*
 - I never read the book and cannot speak to it, but I did appreciate the spirit of this quote, and it certainly seems to apply today
 - Our bodies are always doing a balancing act
 - All 206 bones, 639 muscles, and 6 pounds of skin, along with much more.³
 - Balancing both interior and exterior forces to try and keep healthy
 - And a lot of time time it is easy to forget until something goes wrong
 - I had my first experience with my body losing its struggle for balance back when I was in the 9th grade
 - And I began to feel a small pain in my lower right stomach
 - Within a day or two, it was no longer a small pain, and I was having trouble walking
 - It was my grandfather who said, “I bet it is his appendix,” for he had his appendix rupture sometime around 1940- he knew where this could go
 - We drove to the ER, a most painful journey, and the nurse said that we were just in time and it would have likely burst that night.
 - More recently, as you might have read in the Sword or on Facebook, Katy and I have just witnessed another little body that is already full of health and compromises
 - We saw our unborn baby through the ultra sound, heart beating, body flexing, and the ultrasound tech’s best guess, another little boy.
 - These bodies we have, they are never the same from day to day
 - Health is not so much as a state in which we arrive, but a place of homeostasis- balance
 - Always in flux, always having to adapt to a new day of food, rest, and immune system attacks

¹ <http://www.quotegarden.com/body.html>

² http://www.amazon.com/Why-We-Get-Sick-Darwinian/dp/0679746749#reader_0679746749, page 4

³ Feasting, Homiletical Perspective, p. 279

- And it does it every day with a new group of cells, because since yesterday some have died and some have been born
- It is a fantastic metaphor for our common life together
 - And Paul knew it, and wrote to the Corinthians using it to instruct them on a better way of being community
 - The church in Corinth was not an unusual group- they suffered from what tempts any group of people who come together
 - We might call it politics... politics is what happens when people are near each other
 - The church in Corinth had a few things going on:
 - They had begun to believe that certain groups within the church were superior spiritually to others⁴
 - There was quarreling, and forming complete cliques, all claiming to be more spiritual than the next
 - There was even some question of morality, and behavior not appropriate for Christ followers
 - Paul is concerned with the church's well being, because this church will not be able to work together for much longer towards a common goal
 - This book of the Bible is believed to be one of the oldest, and scholars count this book as one written by Paul himself ⁵
 - In it we get fantastic pieces like the love chapter, which is the chapter following this one, and what we hear read at weddings many times
 - And he uses the body as a metaphor for how we are to be in community together
 - First, we are all in it. Together. On the same team.
 - No matter where you are from (Jew or Greek), and no matter your social standing or status (slave or free)
 - This is quite similar to what Paul writes in Galatians, where he expands this list to include males and females
 - Removing most of the things we often use to rank each other
 - Paul saw the unity of the Spirit, the body that is created, to be more important than all of these other cultural distinctions that the church in Corinth was using to rank its members
 - And like them, for us still today
 - Then he goes on to illustrate that, as a body, as THE body of Christ, we are utterly dependent upon one another

⁴ *Preaching the RCL*, Year C Advent/Christmas/Epiphany, Marion Soards, ed., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 110

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_to_the_Corinthians#Authorship

- One part cannot say to another part they do not need him or her, nor can one part begin to believe they are better
- If one member suffers, all suffer, and if one is raised up, all are
- There are no less honorable members of the Body of Christ, even as there may be less honorable parts of the body... let's be honest
- In short, we need each other ⁶
- We need each other because, as Paul continues, not one of us has all of the gifts that we will need
- There is a piece to the puzzle carried within each of us that is missing when we begin to exclude.
- For me and you, after some 2000 years of hearing this letter from Paul, this is nothing new
 - But it was quite different to what the people in Corinth would have understood to be true
 - Using the body to discuss societies and groups of people was not a new idea, in fact ⁷
 - In his time, this idea of the body was used to reinforce the societal norm, and to prop up a strict hierarchy- an almost social class
 - It was concluded that some parts of the body were naturally better than other parts, more important
 - And should be given more respect and authority
 - While the “lesser” parts of society were to respect the natural arrangement and work hard, pay taxes, and remember their places
 - So Paul's writing here was very different than the common understanding
 - That in Christ's body, it does not work that way, and there are no appendixes in the body of Christ because all are important.
 - The body was much more than a metaphor for Paul, it was metaphysical ⁸
 - It transcended time, space, geography, and political borders
 - This body is more than the sum of its parts, and yet each part is needed
 - It is a call from Paul to balance the needs of the many with the needs of the individual... a bundle of careful compromise.

⁶ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/indispensable-epiphany-3-c-january-27-2019>

⁷ Feasting, Theological Perspective, 278

⁸ Fred Craddock, John Hayes, Carl Holladay, Gene Tucker. *Preaching the New Common Lectionary*. Year C, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985) 136

- It is fortunate, and I love it when the readings come together in a symbiotic way
 - Because if we have this body of Christ, then the question is, what do we do with it?
 - If left alone, we may be tempted to simply tend to its health and happiness, and not use it for anything else
 - Maintenance, with a lack of mission
 - But we hear from Luke's gospel that Jesus does not sit idly.
 - We catch up with Jesus after his baptism last week, and after his wilderness journey with Satan tempting him
 - After all of this, he is filled with the Spirit and returns home to Nazareth
 - This is truly a small town, probably of only several hundred people⁹
 - And you know they remember Jesus, and all 30 years that has come before as he grew up among them
 - They probably remember that one time he wandered off and got lost for three days in the temple
 - And at least for this moment, they are supportive and excited to see who this boy has grown up to be, especially after his spiritual awakening recently
 - Jesus reads from Isaiah, although Luke does not record it all perfectly as Isaiah has it
 - But Luke gets the important bits
 - This is Jesus' inaugural sermon- he sets the mission
 - To proclaim good news to the poor, who are so often without any good news
 - To bring release to captives, captives of all kinds
 - Sight to the blind, blind of all kinds
 - And to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor- a year of Jubilee
 - When traditionally, even if not actually practiced in ancient Israel, the year when debts were erased, land was returned,
 - and you had a chance to start again
 - Good news that, even if you had blown it, lost everything, and were suffering in the dark alone, there was another chance.
 - Good news that as with Paul, the distinctions that divide us are reset and overcome
 - Balance restored.
- A bundle of careful compromises...
 - I know these readings today are familiar, and have been preached on many many times

⁹ Sermon Seeds, year C, Location 1066

- And yet, they are still needed because we are still human, and we still struggle with this
- This balance, these careful compromises, then tension between maintenance and mission
- Between taking a stand, and stopping short of excluding those who are different
- Of believing deeply that as we gather here together here, and with Christians that span time and geography
- We are truly on the same team, what hurts one hurts all
- And together with our strengths and weaknesses, differences and similarities, achievements and failures...
- We are all integral parts of this thing we call the Body of Christ.
- Around two weeks ago, our Peace and Justice committee hosted Randy Lewis to discuss his work at Walgreens
- In particular introducing employment for people with all kinds of differing abilities, or what we might call disabilities.
- And I thought- what a great thought for a church.
- While we may not be diagnosable, or maybe we are!
- It doesn't matter- we are stronger with each other and each others' gifts and ways of doing things.
- So let us begin to be different, here, within these walls, but certainly not contained within them
- To remember that the body- this church body- is not something that strives for the state of perfection, because that is impossible
- But one that pursues the delicate balance of health, maintaining relationships within, as we pursue the mission and the goal
- Being Christ's body is not a metaphor- it is a Truth about who and what we are
- About our purpose, about our relationships with one another
- A body who truly needs each one of us to be whole- differences, imperfections, gifts- all of us... to be its best

Amen.