

I Corinthians 12:1-12

Everyone is connected

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The Apostle Paul has packed a great deal into this passage and more than we can explore today. Do you find it remarkable, as I do, that of all the ways that the Apostle could have used to describe our relationship with the living Christ, he chose this one? Why the Body?

Not only did he choose the Body to describe our relationship with Christ and one another, he goes into great details about how God – God! – has arranged everything just as it is. The ears and the eyes, the hands and feet; at one point you want to say alright, already we get the point. But do we? What if in fact the Apostle is describing what is *really real* and not only image that has no real basis in reality? *What if everything and everyone really are connected as deeply and intimately as a body?*

You remember a metaphor is a figure of speech that describes what is AND is not, at the same time. For instance, the Palmist says, God is my rock and my refuge. We know God is not literally a rock, but there is something so sturdy about God's presence that *rock* is the best and most truthful description. When Saint Paul refers to the people of God as the Body of Christ, he is describing what is profoundly true about our relationships with one another and with Christ. Why this image? Perhaps because he could think of no more intimate way to say what is truly astonishing, namely that after his resurrection and ascension, the living Christ is reconstituted on earth as a Body of believers formed to display his life to the world.

In case your eyes glazed over at what I just said, let me repeat. In the wisdom of the triune God, the living Christ is now joined with very human beings to display His continuing life to the world through this Body. Now look around at one another. This is the astonishing thing the Apostle is saying: it is among humans, that Christ is living now. I hope you are marveling at such a preposterous thing God has done: chosen not only to be incarnate among us in Jesus Christ but even more outlandish God has chosen to make **us** the dwelling place for the living Christ.

God has chosen people who fail frequently, who suffer bouts of depression and denial, battle addictions and anxieties, can be ridiculously petty, arrogant and self-righteous. God has chosen real **humanity** to be the newly constituted Christ for the sole purpose of continuing the work of God in the world. Until one hoped-for day when this humanity becomes mature, indeed, is so like Christ that the joy will be like marriage. This Apostle goes to great length to insist that everyone is this Body matters and not just equally, the inferior will have the greatest of all honor. The eye and the ear: they are obviously important. But so is the seldom named spleen and of course the thyroid. The Apostle wants us to know that God has arranged everyone and everything is such a way for the singular purpose of bearing the Christ to the world. This is possible only when *everyone* is honored

and all are participating in this great divine purpose. No one is left out, and if you are, the Body will not function well.

Years ago, during Holy Communion when I said to the congregation: "the gifts of God for the people of God, take them in the remembrance that Christ died for you", one of our special friends, who suffers a developmental disability, interrupted me. Meg, who is no longer with us, stood up and cried out, "for me?" "For me?" She, of course, had the beautiful courage to ask what all of us ask: "is this grace for me, too?" We are too sophisticated to ask aloud: where do I fit in this Body? What purpose might God have for me in this marvelous Body; I'm not an apostle or a teacher or preacher." Or you might even have darker thoughts like "if they only knew, what I know about myself." If you do have such dark thoughts, and who hasn't at some time, consider the Apostle Peter who betrayed his best friend – Jesus, at the most crucial time in his life, and yet Christ met him on the seashore with a lovely breakfast and a commission to love others. Or consider the Apostle Paul who described himself as the *chief of all sinners*, in whose very weakness God is made strong. What is inferior is the more greatly honored in order that all might work together in love. This is the strange and beautiful ways of our God.

"For me?" she cried. Yes, for you; because you belong to the Body of Christ.

**I want you know to turn to another person, right now, and say: "For you. Because you belong to the Body of Christ."**

Everything is connected. Everyone matters. This is the astonishing grace of God.

Amen.