

"THE BODY OF CHRIST"

Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:14-27

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The body of Christ.

One short phrase, four simple words.

But those words hold a lot of meaning for Christians.

I hope we can think together this morning about some of what those words express.

What do you think of when you hear those words, "the body of Christ"?

++ Communion ... or the communion bread.

Jesus saying to his friends, "This is my body, broken for you."

We remember those words almost every time we have communion.

And they remind us of

++ Christ's suffering ... real, bodily, painful suffering. Not theoretical or pretend

Real human suffering. Suffering that is like ours...

"body of Christ," looked at in this way, is partly an affirmation of Jesus' humanity,
his oneness with us, his true sharing in the pain and pleasure of being human.

I thought about that, about Jesus living in the world

– bringing and being the presence of God ,

 But in a real human body,

 with the sensations of hunger and cold,

 awareness of beauty and danger,

 feelings of joy and outrage.

And I thought about what he *did* with that body:

He went to unexpected and difficult places

- not just synagogue and temple and friends' homes, but
- wilderness places
- communities outside his own
- boats on rough water
- homes of rich people with bad reputations

the grave of a friend
places where lepers lived
... and ultimately halls of judgement presided over by powerful people
who found him disruptive to their interests.

He touched people
– including people others considered untouchable > healing, acceptance

He fed people – and ate with them

He sacrificed his body - in confrontation with power
- as testimony to love that hate and death can't kill.

So I wonder: aren't these the kinds of things the people who follow Jesus are supposed to do, too??
Go where God leads, touch people, feed them, make sacrifices?
Because another thing that phrase, "the body of Christ" refers to is

++ the Church... Christian people... us.

When we say that the church is "the body of Christ" what are we saying?

What are those words saying about what the church is *like*?

+ **Unity & diversity** < all the NT instances of the phrase "body of Christ"
(as in 1 Corinthians 12) are in connection with this idea of unity in diversity.

Unity ... We are one in Christ.

Not just a bunch of separate individuals doing our own thing and having our own private religion we practice on our own, but all part of one body.

Diversity ... Our unity is not meant to be sameness.

We are different people. We have different gifts

Why is this so important, this idea of unity and diversity together?

We share a common cause – following Jesus, sharing God's love.
Reminds me of the words of Paul (Philippians 2) "have the mind of Christ..."
Different gifts enrich the ministry
Everyone is valued, has a place; everyone's gifts matter
What if everyone wants to make the decisions,
but no one wants to make the coffee? or vice versa!
(nothing would work very well, and it wouldn't do much for unity, either!)

That unity and diversity is important within a congregation
...but it also refers to the unity and diversity of the worldwide church:

People kneeling for communion in cathedrals in Europe
Christians struggling to keep the faith in China or fleeing from Syria
worshippers singing all day in crowded church services in Ghana
Christian communities in Central America working collectively for economic justice
men and women praying in monasteries in many places and in different ways...

They are part of us and we are part of them.
The church, the body of Christ, is always bigger than our piece of it.
It takes the gifts of many different Christian communities and cultures to express Christ.

To say that the Church is the body of Christ is also to say something about
+ being the **presence of Christ**, to each other and in the world.

Jesus ... incarnation (which means “in the flesh”) of God’s presence,
Jesus’ followers (we) ... are the incarnation of Jesus’ presence.

We are in the world to do the things that Jesus did.

You are probably familiar with those famous words of St. Theresa of Avila:

“Christ has no body in the world now but yours... no hands but yours....”

We are physical, real-life witnesses to the reality of Jesus, showing him to the world

His representatives, ambassadors - continuing his work, extending his grace, showing his love

“What would Jesus’ do?”
is a question for people who understand that we are the body of Christ.

Is it easy to be the “body of Christ”? or is it hard?

When is it easy?
at church
having communion
being with church friends
when we are being appreciated
when we all agree...

When is it hard?
when we are alone
when we feel lazy
when we know that what Jesus would do is something that we don’t want to do
when our values as Jesus’ followers conflict with the values of those around us
when we might suffer as a result

“The body of Christ” is a way of understanding our identity and purpose as Christians that challenges us, I think.

It grounds us in a particular identity and infuses us with purpose, too, of course.
It enfolds us in God’s love, and in a community where we are valued and where we can contribute.

But it challenges us. Often. Everywhere. In many ways.

Consider:

What does it mean that we are – you are, I am – the body of Christ...

...In the climate of hate and indifference toward immigrants and refugees?

...When people around us are hurting because of grief,
broken relationships,
stressful lives?

...When a friend or loved one needs a lot of support,
more than or something different than you feel capable of giving?

...When you encounter someone who thinks, maybe with reason,
that he or she wouldn’t be welcome in a church?

...When we begin to understand that saving our planet
– or reducing poverty or ending racism –
probably means we will have to give something up?

It is a lot to think about.

I will leave you with this quote, which is from one of the great thinkers in the history of the church, St. Augustine:

“You are the Body of Christ. In you and through you
the work of the incarnation must go forward.
You are to be taken. You are to be blessed, broken and distributed,
that you may be the means of grace and vehicles of eternal love.”