

# Being the Real Body of Christ

B-9: 1 Corinthians 12:4-21; Mark 6:1-13

Robert Woody, 7/8/18

*Sermon-in-a-Sentence: We cannot be a functional Body of Christ unless we intentionally focus on building relationships that enable us to work together.*

## Children's Sermon:

What is the “**Body of Christ**”? Ever heard of that? Paul uses those words when he wrote **letters** to the early churches to describe what “we,” the Church should really be like. Paul said, “You guys and gals, and everyone here, are like different parts of a body: some of you are like fingers, some toes, some noses, some lungs.

Are we literally noses, toes, fingers? No, these are “metaphors.” Paul is saying we are all different, we have different gifts and strengths. But, if we aren't connected, and sharing our gifts and strengths, we can't really get much done as a team. What can a toe do by itself? But if we are connected like a **body**, then, we can work together and accomplish amazing things.”

So part of our job, as followers of Jesus, is to build connections and relationships with other followers so that when we need to do something important to help someone or some group, we can work together, combine our gifts and skills, and make a difference. Make sense?

When Jesus sent his disciples out to villages to start building new churches, he told them to **focus on relationships**. He told them, “Don't bring everything you need – extra clothes, food, money,” so you can live by yourself; be independent. He told them to build relationships, find someone who will welcome you in their house, and who will use their gifts and skills to support you, as you use your gifts and skills to support them and help them build a real church family, be the Body of Christ.

**Sundays at Rec** are not just about showing up to hear sermons, hear a Sunday School lesson, receive communion, and go home. It's about **building relationships**, building a body, and working together.

Do you know why we have the rowdiest “**Passing of the Peace**” I've ever seen in a church? It's not just about saying “Peace” to the person next to you. It's about walking all around the church and greeting as many people as you can to start, and build, and strengthen relationships. Why do we serve **breakfast** between services throughout the school year, September through May? So we can sit together at a table, and share a meal and get to know each other. Why do we do **Coffee Hour** after our 10:30 am service? Same thing. Meet people. Sit at tables together. Get to know them. And our Breakfast teams and Coffee Hour teams are working together, using their variety of gifts & skills, helping us to get to know each other.

Our focus at Rec of greeting each other, sharing breakfast together, sharing the peace, all these things are about recognizing and building the **Body of Christ**. If you just show up for church, listen to the sermon, take communion and go home, you are **not** becoming a part of the Body of Christ. You are not building relationships with other Christians, so you can work together to love your neighbors; make a difference in the world.

Who wants to be part of the **Body of Christ**? Then find ways to meet each other, get connected, and share your gifts!

#### **Adult Sermon:**

Why is the Church declining? Why are most denominations and churches stagnant or shrinking? I don't really know for sure. But I am trying to listen and observe and imagine what is going on. And imagine what could make a difference.

I think our readings today point to some of what may be happening. When Jesus sent his disciples out in today's Gospel reading to start birthing and building the Church, he gave them some strange commands.

First, he told them: "take **nothing** for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money" and no extra clothes. Find someone you can live with for your whole stay, and depend on them for food and extra clothes. Why would Jesus demand that of his disciples? Why would he make his disciples deeply **dependent** on others, upon those they were going to **serve**? If the disciples had extra stuff and some money, they could live independently; their lives would be easier. Much simpler. And more boring.

I think Jesus knew that the **heart** of the Church would be in building deep relationships, and interdependence, not independence. I think Jesus wanted his disciples to be "interdependent," connected and working with those they were trying to gather together to become the Church. What does "interdependent" mean?" Jesus wanted his disciples to make all the church members connected, and working together, like a **body**. Part of being "interdependent" is realizing that we all have different strengths and different needs. We are all human. And if we work together, if we love one another, if we become an interacting body, our lives and the life of the Church becomes much more abundant.

I can't remember the last time I did a sermon when I didn't mention my son Seth; and here we go again. His first year out of college Seth lived in an Episcopal Monastery as an intern. He had meals with, worshiped with, worked with the monks, and built very deep relationships. That year changed his life. And in the six years since then, he has always lived in an intentional community. He lives with, has meals with, worships with, works with, plays with other young adults who have similar passions about social justice issues and spirituality. They are not all

the same. They have different strengths and weaknesses. But they are committed to living and working together so they can be a “body” capable of really loving their neighbors.

If we are going to be the “Body of Christ,” we have to be willing to recognize and honor our diverse gifts and use them to support each other, and work together.

In the first part of our Gospel reading, Jesus was rejected in his hometown because wouldn’t recognize and honor his amazing gifts. The people of his hometown saw him grow up, as a kid and a teenager, and he eventually become a carpenter. How could this carpenter, who they watched grow up, become a holy spiritual leader and healer? No way. They rejected him. They weren’t willing to affirm and accept and support his amazing spiritual gifts because to them, he was just a carpenter.

Paul seemed to have a similar focus when he talks about the Church being the “Body of Christ.” We are all different, with different gifts, skills, experience, and different weaknesses and burdens. Like Paul says, some of us are toes. We’re good at walking, but not so much hearing. Some of us are ears, some fingers, some probably livers. We are all very different, and differences can often separate us.

But look at your body. Thank God we’re not all made up of toes, or fingers, or noses. If we can work together, like the parts of our body, despite our differences, if we can connect our toes and feet, and fingers and hands, and eyes and ears, we can do amazing things. We can be a highly functional “body.”

I wonder if part of the decline of the Church is part of our decline in being the “**Body of Christ**,” as Paul described it – a diversity of people, ages, education, race, skill sets, *etc.* – working together, sharing our gifts to **love** and **serve** our diverse neighbors.

Simply worshipping together is not enough. We need to be the diverse **Body of Christ** working together to serve and love our neighbors. We need to be together and to love and serve each other when we face times of crisis.

Reconciliation is not perfect. But we have, in many ways, been a vibrant and active “Body of Christ” because we have a tradition and DNA of working together to welcome and include and serve people who were on the margins, and to bring about reconciliation. I love the incredible beauty of our campus and sanctuary, thanks to our gardeners and artists, willing to share their gifts and their time. I love our breakfast and coffee hour times on Sunday. Sometimes it’s the favorite part of my Sunday. I love the opportunity to sit down with and get to know newcomers. And the opportunity to visit with long time Reconcilers who may be facing some difficult medical or other challenges. I am so thankful for our breakfast and coffee

hour teams who offer their skills and time to create opportunities for the rest of us to come together.

I love our “passing of the peace,” as chaotic as it gets. I love our blessings for birthdays and anniversaries and 10 years of sobriety. And the transparency to share difficult medical issues, or other concerns. All of these things make us more of a family, more of the Body of Christ, so that we can collaborate to love each other and love our neighbors.

Our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will help remind us of all the ways we have been, and all the things we have done to be a real “Body of Christ.” And, as our world is changing, hopefully it will help us imagine how we can be the “Body of Christ” in the future. I think faith communities that are really working on being interdependent, being a real “Body of Christ,” are much more likely to survive and thrive in our changing world.

So if you are new, or relatively new to Rec, or if you have been mostly sitting on the sidelines, I invite you to look for an opportunity, a ministry, where you can share your gifts and skills and build a deeper connection with Rec and be a part of the “Body of Christ.”