

The Body of Christ

Roman's 12:1-5 + Eph 4:11-16

This is the third and final section on Loving God/ Loving our Neighbour where we are looking at Unity in Christ. We looked at and the who and the why we should love and today are going to start to look at the HOW. Today we are considering being one body in Christ. What does that actually mean – what might that look like?

After World War II bombs damaged a CATHEDRAL restoration began. As work progressed, they became concerned about a large statue of Jesus, whose arms were outstretched and beneath which was the inscription: "Come unto Me." They had particular difficulty trying to restore the hands, which had been completely destroyed. After much discussion, they decided to let the hands remain missing and changed the inscription to: "Christ has no hands but ours."

The work of Jesus Christ in the world our hands, it is in the hands of those who belong to Him. In that sense, He has no hands but our hands, and no feet but our feet. But in order to serve God and be what He desires as the readings this morning teach us, we must first be a living and holy sacrifice. Only as a living sacrifice can we be what He wants us to be, do what He wants us to do, and thereby prove that the will of God is good, acceptable and perfect.

In fact the Romans reading teaches us that we are all one body in Christ and as such we need to be living sacrifices. Now when we hear about 'sacrifices' we would associate them with death don't we. But Paul is not talking about physical death here but the sacrifice that puts our sinful ways to death and allows us to have new life.

And Paul states that each of us is called to be a living sacrifice because we are bound together in the body of Christ, the church. So What are we living for? What is our ultimate goal in life? Are we living for ourselves - for your own pleasures in life or are we living to please Jesus? When we are faced with decisions in life where we have to choose His way or our own selfish way, if WE CHOOSE HIS WAY - we choose purposely to obey His Word; we choose to be living sacrifices.

Now Jesus was fully God but he came to earth to live amongst us – therefore he was also fully human. Just as Jesus was born as a baby and grew to be a man, so it is for us. We grow and mature physically but spiritually as well. And unless we mature we are vulnerable. When we hit trouble and difficulties often our faith can crumble and we feel tossed about on an open sea.

Sailing in the Solent.

We are not alone – we have God on our side and we have others to surround us with love and support. We are all one body in Christ and that He is the head. Now all parts of the body need one another to function. I mean the eyes can't smell gas for example which warns us of danger. My feet can't see the way to go etc. In order for the body to function fully, then all parts are needed. Just like a church congregation: where each of us represent different parts – we all share one faith even though we have different temperaments, backgrounds, gifts and abilities.

So here's the thing – when one part is hurting the whole body hurts and is impaired in its working. We have some members of our congregation that are very unwell or going through tough times. We hurt with them, we miss their presence – we are not fully functioning without them. So we continue to pray for them and offer to help in practical ways. And all this is appreciated – heard many times in the last 2 weeks how people really value the church's support of them. Thank you.

But as a body we also have to consider other functions of the body .Each part is to be used to **build up the body** and help move each other toward completion and perfection in Christ (1 Cor. 12:7), the greater the usefulness the greater the building up of the body. We belong to each other, we minister to each other **and we need each other if we are ever going to realize what Christ has for His body.**

In Romans 12, believers are reminded that while they are part of one body in Christ, they all have different God-given abilities. Every child of God is obligated to recognize his particular talents and to use them in God's service. In a commercial airliner, the pilot, co-pilot, mechanics, engineers, and flight attendants all have different responsibilities. What jeopardy the passengers would be in if each crew member neglected his duties for another role! In

much the same way, serious harm can come to a church if its members clamour for the position of another. Each needs to do their different responsibilities to make a flight successful.

The emphasis is on **unity in diversity**. We are one body with many members that do not have the same function and therefore we are diverse. We are dependent upon one another and our diversity amplifies and enhances our functioning in our fellowship. The point here is that each member functions to serve the body. **The body is not intended to serve its individual members, but the members are to serve the body under the head of the body, Jesus Christ.**

We need to recognize the gifts God have given us and use them to do the task that God wants us to do." And do it well! God wants us to use the unique traits He as built into us. We function best and accomplish the most for the Lord when we do the task we've been made to do. It's fruitless and frustrating to try to be something we are not.

With God's help, each of us has to discover and confirm our spiritual gift(s). Some might feel uncomfortable doing this. It's hard for them to talk about their strengths. But that misses the point. These are not abilities for which we can take credit. We need to acknowledge our strengths for they are capacities that the Creator Himself has put within us for our good and to fulfil His purposes, in life and in the church. In Ephesians we read that people are called to different things; Apostles, prophets , pastors and teachers Each are given gifts for the work that God wants them to do –building up the Body which also includes Mission ? outreach of course. And here's the thing: as Churches we come up with plans for mission and outreach and then ask God to bless them!! But actually God is asking us to be a part of His mission (Misseo Dei) to build the Kingdom in His way – the way that He purposed centuries ago.

So let's discover our talents and gifts and then offer them back to God so that he can use us to build up His church. Do what God has gifted you to do to build up the body. **Remember even little is much if God is in it.**

No gift or ability, spiritual or otherwise, is of value if it is not used.

I read the account of a man who owns a large COLLECTION of rare and valuable

violins. It is highly unlikely that anyone will play those marvellous instruments as long as they are simply stored, protected, and admired. But in the hands of accomplished musicians, those violins could be making beautiful music to inspire and bless countless thousands of hearers.

It is infinitely more tragic that many Christians keep their spiritual gifts stored, rather than using them to serve the Lord who gave them the gifts.

If we are going to glorify God by sharing His love with our community and the world, we will need to use what God has given each of us. God expects us to make the most of what He's given us.

Make a list of what you're good at and what you're not. Involve others. Tell them you're searching for the truth, not fishing for compliments. Ask yourself: where have I seen fruit in my life that others have confirmed?

The best way to find your spiritual gift is to experiment. Just start serving God! You discover your gifts by getting involved. You'll never know what you're good at until you try! Remember, the greatest ability is dependability.

When LEONARDO DA VINCI was still a pupil, his elderly, well-known teacher asked him to finish a painting he had begun. Young da Vinci stood in such awe of his master's skill that at first he respectfully declined. But his teacher would accept no excuse. He simply said, "Do your best."

Trembling, da Vinci took his brush and began. With each stroke, his hand grew more steady as the genius within him awoke. Soon he was so caught up in his work that he forgot his timidity.

When the painting was finished, the frail and weak master was carried into the studio to see it. Embracing his student, he exclaimed, "My son, I paint no more!"

Every Christian has unique God given abilities. Some, however, feel inferior because they don't have as much talent as others. But we mustn't think that way. **God doesn't hold us accountable for what we don't have. He wants us to discover and develop the skills we do have.**

Finally we are also asked not to 'conform any longer to the pattern of this world'

There are thermostats and there are thermometers. What's the difference? One registers the temperature and the other regulates the temperature. We are supposed to be **regulators of the world's temperature**. Only by working together can we be a part of the body that changes the world!

The way of the world is either opposed to God and Christ or indifferent to God (often apathy is the hardest to deal with).

Addressing a national seminar of Southern Baptist leaders, George Gallup said, "Eight out of ten Americans consider themselves Christians, Gallup said, yet only about half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount, and fewer still could recall five of the 10 Commandments. Only two in ten said they would be willing to suffer for their faith."

In I John 2:15-17 "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

We are called to be counter cultural but we need to recognise that not all aspects of human society are bad – but we must challenge those parts which are. We must be thermostats regulating the temperature instead of letting it regulate us! And we can achieve this by 'transforming our minds as it says in Romans

And our minds and our thinking will never be right unless the human mind is saturated with scripture and the Word of God. The mind and body are closely linked but without Jesus as the head we can't function properly.

Being part of the 'body of Christ' means we all have a role to play.

So look around you – do you see something around you that Christ needs to take care of today? Remember that story we had at the beginning – Jesus has no hands... but your hands!

If we are the body
We need to be reaching out our arms
We should be healing
We should be sharing our faith with word and action
And if we are the body
We need to be His heart
We need to love others and show them that Jesus is the way

Let's use the gifts that God has given us to strengthen and build up the body of which we are part. Let us recognise that there is unity in diversity in we remain in Christ. And let us start today!