

Introduction

I wonder how you feel about your body? I know mine isn't quite how I'd like it to be, and that often it doesn't behave how I would like it to behave. When I was younger I hated being so tall – although I actually quite like it now. I also get exasperated when my body lets me down and gets tired and weak when I don't think it should. I was talking this week to a lady who has lost most of her vision following a stroke and she was very frustrated with the limitations she has to deal with. But I think that for most of us, if we are honest, there is something about our bodies that we would like to change. We feel out of proportion or an odd shape. In fact bodies are funny things when you think about it – a collection of bits joined together which are meant to work together smoothly.

In the New Testament one of the most common descriptions of the church is "The body of Christ" and I think that often, as a church, we might feel that we are a strange collection of bits and don't feel totally at home with each other. Our reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians gives us a picture of how we all fit together as the body of Christ and how we can all work together. So I'd like us to take a look to see what we can learn from it.

1. We are one

V12 *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all given the same Spirit to drink."*

We all belong to Christ and all believers, whatever their age, colour, gender, experience and abilities, are members of his body. As we look around the church we see many people who are different from us; in age, in tastes, in experience, in gifts and talents. It would be easy just to get to know those who are the same as we are and who think the same as we do, but the Bible tells us that although the church is made up of many different parts we are united by our faith in Christ, we all have his Spirit within us and we belong together.

You may feel there are people in church that you have nothing in common with, but as Christians our common bond is Jesus Christ. As we open ourselves to Jesus and allow him more control in our lives we will find that we have more in common with each other than we thought and will also find that our mutual love for Christ will draw us together. Our church is not a group of people chosen by us but a group chosen by God.

A good example of this is Jesus' disciples. I must confess that if I was choosing a group of people to form the basis of my church my first choice would probably not have been the disciples: Peter – impetuous and hot

headed; James and John – the pushy sons of thunder; Thomas the cynic, Judas- the betrayer. Yet although they were so different they were one, united by their love of Jesus and their desire to please him and by their common purpose of serving him and called to be the foundation of Jesus' church. He has called a mixed and diverse church to serve him.

And

It is made up of different parts

We are all different – and thank God for that. Imagine a church made up simply of people like you! As Paul says:

"But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part where would the body be? As it is there are many parts but one body."

Although we belong together we are all different and we have to be. If we were all the same we would have a very limited usefulness.

As Paul says: *"if the whole body were an eye how would it hear?"*

Some parts of the body might be more obviously useful than others but they are all needed if the body is to work properly. It is the same in the body of Christ. Some members may be more obviously gifted than others but we all have our own special part to play and we are all needed if the body is to function well. I love verse 18,

"God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

He has given us our talents and characteristics and experience because that is how he wants us to be and we each have our own special part to play in the body. When you feel inadequate or unlovely remind yourself of that. I think we often look at other people and wish we were like them. They may seem to be so much better than we are at things – or at least more confident than we are! but if we think about it there are probably things we can do that they can't and if we were to try to be like them there would be an imbalance – too many eyes but perhaps a toe would be missing..... toes are important too try balancing without one. But the question we need to ask ourselves as we consider our beautiful body is are we making each and every part of our body feel welcome and valuable.

Each one of us, whatever our age or background has gifts and we all have an important part to play as a member of the church family here in the

Four Church Benefice. We all need to be accepted as we are and play our part – exactly as we would in a human family. We all have our role and our place.

2. We are God's body

God made us and put us together how he wants us to be. My body is unique – you'll never see another one exactly like it. (Which is something to be thankful for!) in the same way you'll never see another body of Christians exactly like the body of Christ here in the Benefice. God has brought each member into the church here because he wants us here, he has given each of us the gifts and character he wants us to have and he has plans for our future individually and as a church. In Paul's letter to the Colossians he describes Jesus by saying;

"He is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body's life."

Each one of us can control our bodies, we expect them to do what we tell them to. Imagine what would happen to us if our bodies decided for themselves what they would do..... sometimes mine goes to sleep when I don't want it to, which can be embarrassing and annoying. But imagine how difficult life would be if when we got up in the morning our bodies went off to work without letting us dress them first, or give them breakfast. What would happen if they stood up when we got into a car? Or lay down when we tried to cross the road? It wouldn't work would it.

In the same way if we are God's body we must behave in the way he wants us to collectively and individually. We must allow him to control us and we must obey him. It may sound obvious but our life comes from Christ and so he must be the centre of our life together. Christ must be at the centre of all we do, whether it's meeting for worship, serving coffee, setting up the church, meeting for prayer or Bible study or having fun together. As we meet together we will meet with Jesus and people coming into this church will meet him in us and God will be glorified through us.

So as the body of Christ we are one, we are all different, we are God's body and:

3. We need each other

Verse 21 says this: *"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' and the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'. On the contrary those parts of the body that seem weaker are indispensable."*

None of us can survive on our own, we belong to other Christians and we need them. Returning to the picture of the body it is fine as long as each part is functioning as it should but if one part stops working or

Readings**The body beautiful****Foxton and Fowlmere****1 Corinthians 12:12-31a****Luke 4:14-21**

becomes less effective we notice it. Not always straight away but eventually we realise that something's wrong and that the body isn't functioning in the way it should. If our church isn't welcoming to all ages and types of people we will only find certain types and ages present and we will no longer be the full body of Christ but a distorted version of it. A place where only certain ages or types of people feel comfortable, A place that isn't representative of the community in which we live.

And finally as the body of Christ we must grow and develop. It is not enough that we exist. We must grow and develop and make progress. If a body isn't growing and renewing itself it starts to fade and die. It is the same with our faith and with a church. As the body of Christ we need to make sure that we are growing, not just in numbers, but spiritually. Our faith needs to develop and grow, it can't stay stuck at how it was at a particular point in our lives. We need to be open to God's leading and nourishing so that we are vital and alive and not old and tired or simply stuck in our faith. We need to feed our faith through God's word and Bible study and prayer. We need to exercise by meeting together and worshipping and encouraging each other. As we do we will find ourselves growing together, becoming closer together and to God. As each and every member develops and grows and uses their gifts and as we allow God to lead and direct us we will bring glory to him as we were created to do.

Mention Lent Course; Being Disciples