

Making it Work
1 Cor 12:20-26 James 5:13-16

Brothers and sisters I had a couple of other titles in mind for this last message on what it means for us to BE together as a church – as the Body of Christ.

I considered calling it “Membership has its benefits” but then I thought, no... that might give the wrong impression that being a member of Christ’s body is more like being a member of a Country Club, that exists to cater to you – and that is not an accurate illustration about being the church.

And then I thought about calling it “Bodily Functions” but then I started thinking about all the crude, off-color jokes and comparisons which that title could conjure up and I figured – probably not a good idea...

But - it is closer to the point which I believe Christ wants us to take away from this message series – that each of us needs to discover and pursue the role we are created to play as parts of His body if His body is going to function.

So I ended up calling it “Making It Work!” because this series isn’t about gaining more head-knowledge about the church – its about understanding who we are together so that we start to act accordingly and do the work Christ gave us – making disciples of all nations.

You see brothers and sisters we don’t want to be like the proverbial doctor on a cruise ship who after many years of treating only scrapes and bruises, seasickness and hangovers finally gets a chance to put his more advanced medical skills to use when a crew member comes down with appendicitis.

So he gathers a team of people to help him, preps the patient, gets him on the operating table and begins to perform the surgery – however He becomes so engrossed in explaining all the technical details of this surgery and the showing how the different parts of the body are supposed to work to his helpers that the patient ends up dying...

In the same way brothers and sisters, we’ve spent some time learning about being together as the body of Christ, coming to

understand what the different parts of the body are, and being challenged to make being together a priority, being challenge to make a commitment to belong...

but unless this all literally comes together and comes to life for us and we Be the Body – unless we Make it Work – its just a lifeless collection of parts – and we can spend our time just talking about it and it kind of dies on us.

But the good news friends is that scripture gives us illustrations of what it looks like when the body works – and because the scripture is the living Word of God – and as we hear the scripture describe how the Body functions and meditate on it – it's not just talk... the Holy Spirit moves among us to give life to this collection of different parts and brings us to life – together as Christ's Body.

Just like that Old Testament vision where Ezekiel sees a valley full of dry bones, and he prophesies to them, speaks to them, and they come together and the Spirit of God breaths life into them and a vast army of living bodies is raised up.

This was looking forward to Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who comes upon us as a lifeless collection of body parts and causes us to be knitted together in community, enlivening us, quickening us, and empowering us for our Christ given task.

So having said all that, I wonder - what comes to mind for you in thinking about the Body of Christ functioning as it should?

I hope that since we focused on all the various spiritual gifts, grace gifts last week that you are thinking about being a congregation that is using these gifts and gathering together for worship, and there is preaching and teaching, and prayer and musicians leading the singing of praise, and people being hospitable and serving coffee...

Or you are thinking about the Church actively going out to do mission work – making disciples, proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ, and feeding the hungry, caring for the poor and homeless and sick and speaking up against injustice, countering lies with truth.

Or perhaps in your mind a properly function Church has to do with systems and structure – the church as a vision, and clearly defined goals, well run programs staffed with trained volunteers... oops I mean Spirit filled body parts.

Administratively it has its finances are in order, it's meeting the budget and takes good care of its facilities and property...

And these are all ways in which the body of Christ functions, all of them are important and we are all gifted in different ways to contribute to the body functioning actively like this.

However - the descriptions of the body we read this morning have to do with being a healthy body, not just an active body, and that is an important distinction that the Lord wants us to focus on this morning. It's important that the body is not only active – but also healthy, because you can be active without being healthy, but its hard to be healthy without being active.

So let's look at verse 24b from 1 Cor 12, where Paul writes *"God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,"*

This tells us that as God's has designed the body, He has given greater honor to the parts we don't typically pay attention to. So all the activities we just mentioned; preaching teaching praise etc.. are the high profile, glamorous functions of the body, like our face, our hair, our legs and arms – they get all the attention.

But what about our less glamorous parts? they parts we don't pay much or any attention to. Our bowels for example – or our body's immune system? When was the last time you said "I can't go out with my bowels looking like this... or I'm having a bad immune system day"

But, if you've ever had a problem with your bowels or you suffer from IBS you know much it can affect you... And living through a pandemic really made us appreciate how important a properly functioning immune system is.

In the same way the scripture tells us that God has given greater honor to the body's functions which are not up front and glamorous, because without these important functions

the church will not be healthy enough to do things like worship and making disciples. So, what are the less glamorous functions in the church which have been given greater honor?

Well brothers and sisters, James 5:13-16 speaks about the body's functions of healing and confession, and 1 Cor 10:13 speaks about dealing with temptation and the body's function of accountability.

And these functions are not glamorous, but they are so necessary – they are essential workers in the body - because the truth, as vs. 26 says - is that if one of our members is suffering – it affects all of us. Because we're a body.

We may not like that, we may wish it was different, that we weren't so connected - but it's very clear in the scripture that if one part suffers; every part suffers with it...

If you are going through a hard time it can prevent you from showing up to play the part of the body you were designed to

be... if you are struggling with sin and temptation – the same thing happens, or worse yet you're giving the devil a foothold to cause offense and division in the body. The Lord wants to bless His body – but He doesn't bless sin.

Now don't go thinking this means you need to put up a good front like everything is ok in your life when the church gathers together, or that you should only show up when you're no longer struggling with sin or temptation – that's just silly.

Instead if you are suffering, you need to gather together with the body – because your burden can be distributed among us, it makes it a lighter load for you. And the truth is you don't have to fight temptation and deal with sin all by yourself, we fight it with you.

The rest of the body can come along side of you to perform the Body's functions of healing, confession, accountability and reconciliation to restore you to back to health.

This is why James instructs us in his letter *“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”*

And please note this encouragement is for us to take the initiative and let the leadership of the church know what is going on in their lives; “let **them** call the elders...”

Brothers and sisters good church leaders certainly watch out for the body parts – but we are not mind readers, we don’t know all the details, especially if you don’t want us to know... So scripture puts the responsibility on the parts of the body to let the body know when things aren’t going well.

Brothers and sisters - this is at the heart of making it work. If we all take responsibility to connect together as the body that Christ has designed us to be – this can work, the body can be healthy – effective in our work of making disciples.

If we don’t – the body functions of healing, confession, accountability and reconciliation won’t be able to work properly. At best people will feel neglected and uncared for

and feel like the only time they hear from the leadership is when they need help for something like missions.

At worst a problem or an issue that is causing someone to suffer will fester and get worse until it blows up and causes more collateral damage to other parts of the body – perhaps even doing damage to the task of the church.

So brothers and sisters the encouragement to us here... is for **all** of us to take responsibility to make the body work – let our leaders, let our Christian friends, let our small groups, our ministry leaders - let them know what is going on in our lives that needs healing, confession, accountability... and if we’ve hurt someone, esp. another part of the body - reconciliation.

Now – we’re not used to this. We’re accustomed to dealing with things like sickness, temptation, and our sins in private, on our own, by ourselves.

And if we have an issue with someone, if they have offended us, or perhaps we've offended them - we withdraw and back away – and we're comfortable with doing things this way.

But brothers and sisters, the body of Christ can't work this way – that not how it's designed. Can you imagine if we related to our physical bodies in the same way, just distancing or ignoring a part of our body that was suffering?

Well I guess some people do – I'm sure we all know someone who did not get checked regularly by the doctor and it was too late in the game by the time they realized they had a serious health issue for any treatment to be effective.

So now we have advertising campaigns to raise awareness and take away the stigma associated with going to the doctor to keep an eye on your health.

So brothers and sisters – consider this an advertising campaign for us to get over the stigma of coming together to deal with our sickness, our sins, our broken relationships and our temptations...

Dayna's story is a wonderful example of what can happen in our lives if we are willing to do that.¹ She posted this online:

One of the things I have recently (within the year) been through is I quit smoking. (Gasp) I know- I have been a Christian most of my life, but those 10 years I spent out in the world developed some bad habits in me that God has and is dealing with in me. Smoking was the last thing I was holding on to from my past. So when I quit smoking, a very good friend touched base with me every day. She held me accountable to a higher standard. She took me away from the stresses of the day and distracted me from my obsession. She reminded me that God had something for me that was better than the cigarette that in that moment I missed so much and

¹ <http://www.alanknox.net/2012/03/a-church-that-perseveres-through-temptation/>

was tempted to go back to. She prayed for me and she prayed with me. For me it was smoking. For you it may be something else. I think that together we are stronger than we are apart. A 3-fold cord is not easily broken.

Brothers and sisters, it may feel awkward and take us out of our comfort zone to make the Body work this way – but in the end, it benefits us.

As Dayna said – for her it was smoking – for us it will be something else - don't believe the lie that the Body of Christ is a group of "nice" people who are nice to other nice people. Remember - what brings us together is that we're all just forgiven sinners... and we are all still struggling with the reality of sin in our lives in some way shape or form.

Certainly, by God's grace we have overcome the sin of unbelief and we now trust in Jesus Christ as our savior.

But the reality is that we can still be bitter, proud, resentful, lazy... we can gossip, lie, cheat and steal... there are things

that we would be ashamed to have others know about us. We all carry emotional baggage and deal with our mental health.

But when the Body functions as it should and we can open up to each other about the reality of sin in our life - we can be assured that we've been forgiven of our sins, reconciliation is possible and we can gain victory over temptation.

But if we are going to make it work – we need to get off on the right foot. An overly aggressive immune system which attacks the body is just as bad as one that doesn't work to defend it.

So there are ways we must come together in order for these functions to occur. With regards to reconciliation Jesus gives us some fairly specific instructions in Matthew 18.

He says *"if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses*

every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

Now the specifics of these instructions are not the focus of our message today – however do they illustrate to us that there is a process for dealing with things which make people suffer – in this case broken relationships –

And we must follow that process so we don’t end up being like an overly aggressive immune system that attacks the body

So as we close off this series and we want to put into action all that we’ve learned about being the body of Christ – If we want to “Make it Work” like it is supposed to...what’s the best way to do that?

Well – let me switch up the metaphor and instead of using human bodies as an example – let’s use the heavenly bodies that make up a solar system. So, what kind of heavenly body are you in the Valleyview solar system?

If you have just started to circle around the far edges of our community, you’ve just started to attend services here and you’re just getting to know us then rest assured that we don’t expect you to show up next week and bare your soul to us.

But, in a few weeks maybe you want to take the next step of giving me your contact info and we can make arrangement to get together for coffee.

And once we’ve had coffee a couple times, hopefully you’ll have gotten to know and trust me enough that we can have conversation about what sorts of things Christ is doing in your life and how Valleyview can help that continue and increase...

And if you are someone who runs a wide but regular orbit with Valleyview – you attend worship often, every few weeks, and you know a few people in the church – maybe the next step for you is to begin to work at building some closer relationships with people here.

Stay around afterwards and have some coffee, stay for a Souperbowl Sunday, ask other people to share their story of how God brought them to Valleyview, share with them how you ended up here. That's a good start to learn how to have the kind of spiritual conversation that makes the Body work.

And maybe you are in close orbit with Valleyview – almost right in the center of things. That's a great place to be – and its an easy step from there to start attending men's group or women's group where we work at building the intimate, trusting, caring community so we can safely share where we need healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and accountability.

And of course, regardless of where you fall in the Valleyview solar system, you can never go wrong with contacting your minister and letting me know what's going on in your life.

Give me a call, send me a text or an email with some specific things that you would like to have prayer for, or let me know you want to grab a coffee because you've got something you need to get off your shoulders.

Because the more you connect with me, the more I'm able to help facilitate connecting you to others who understand what you're dealing with and can support you – and the more I can pray with you, not just for you...

So, friends, those are some ways that we can *all* take some real steps forward in "Making it Work" and bringing the reality of the Body of Christ to life in our everyday lives.

And I want to close off this message with a little exercise that will help us realize how we're all affected by this, we're all in it together.

Is there anyone who was sick this past week or month?

Raise your hand.

Was there anyone who had a family member, or someone they cared about who was sick this past week or month? raise your hand.

Was there anyone who felt guilty for doing something they knew was wrong, raise your hand.

Were you tempted to do something Christ would not approve of, raise your hand.

Were you offended by another person this week, or somehow offended someone else this past week? Raise your hand.

And anyone who doesn't have their hand up yet about being sick, feeling guilty, being tempted or offending someone – you're not being honest, so you better raise your hand.

You see brothers and sisters, we're all in this together. As 1 Cor 10:13 says "*no temptation has overtaken us except what is common to all of us*" but we are not supposed to deal with these things in private anymore but together – and that is the way out that God has provided for us in being a part of His Body.

Christ has placed us in His body, and joined us together as His body so that we can receive healing, experience forgiveness, overcome temptation and work towards reconciliation.

We need to give honor and recognition to these less glamorous functions – identify and empower those who are gifted to lead this for us, and take responsibility to work at whatever part we are to play with these functions.

We know what that's like for our own bodies, we need to realize how important it is for us to function as a healthy Church together – doing this together is a part of making disciples.

So as a show of solidarity towards each other that we understand this is Christ's intention for us, let us honor these less glamorous functions by raising a hand of blessing to each other as we pray for the Holy Spirit to work confession, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and accountability among us – and to give us each the courage to "make this work"

Let's pray.