

Missing Body Parts
1 Corinthians 12:1-20

Brothers and sisters, what if tomorrow morning... Monday morning, everyone showed up for work as they normally do but for some strange and mysterious reason each person happened to be missing some part of their body!

Employees would be converging on their workplace, gathering around the water cooler - and maybe the conversation would go like this...

Hey Bob where's your hand? Oh – it decided to sleep in this morning... Where's your leg Steve?

Oh, my leg? Well since I have two of them my left one figured that I didn't need both at the same time so it decided to take the day off.

Oh – I see – hey did you hear about Susan over in marketing? She lost her head!

Really, again! Bummer! Well, I suppose she'll just have to make do until she finds it back – she really ought to look at getting that thing screwed on right.

Well look at the time – I suppose we ought to get started, is Williams coming in today for that presentation?

No – He just up and quit, he didn't have the heart anymore...

Oh man – do we have a replacement for him yet?

Well HR is looking but you know how difficult it is when you have to keep an eye out... (Hahahaha)

And on and on it would go...and what would be even stranger is that everyone would consider this absence of body parts to be normal, when it's clearly ridiculous – and not to mention... prone to bad humor!

But Brothers and sisters, it's no laughing matter when it actually happens on Sunday mornings as the Church shows up

and gathers together as the Body of Christ to pursue it's calling to minister to each other and to our community.

We're missing body parts, and we've gotten so used to this we consider it to be normal.

Hey good to see you this morning, where's your family – Oh they're at a school function...Hey have you seen Linda recently? No...I think she's away for a few months... What about Louie? Oh, he was here last week – I guess you must have missed him while you were away...

We all know how this goes right? We've all had these types of conversations...

Any maybe you've even greeted and welcomed someone you thought was a "new-comer" only to discover that they've actually been connected to Valleyview for twenty years – but you've never seen them before! And the strange part is that we find this is normal in the church...

But Brothers and sisters, this morning our scripture passage from 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that it is not normal for Christians to connect with their Church only once in a while...

Only at Christmas and Easter... only once every few months... or maybe even just once a month...

The apostle Paul illustrates how we, as individual followers of Jesus Christ, are connected to each other by using the human body as an example – and thus the implication is that individual believers are not casually connected with each other. Body parts don't simply show up every few months when they have a free weekend...

No Brothers and sisters, part of what Paul wants us to understand about the Body of Christ – The Church – is that each of us as individuals plays a vital role in bringing it to life!

Which means we need to be intentional about gathering together – that's the whole point in our series this month.

Now I understand life circumstances might not allow for us to get out to church more than once per month on a Sunday morning, some of us only get every other Sunday off of work, and some of us have to travel so we're away some Sundays, there's any number of life circumstances beyond our control that can get in the way of us always being able to get out to church and gather together every Sunday morning.

Now the goal of this sermon series is to encourage weekly and regular gathering and participation in worship, as the church through ensuring that we know and believe the truth about what it means to belong to Christ's body, not through nagging you or making you feel guilty.

So while I want to see you gather weekly and regularly, I don't want you to do this grudgingly or legalistically. And the good news Brothers and sisters, is that you can supplement Sunday worship when you miss it - with other opportunities to connect with the Body.

When you are away you can stay connected through joining worship online, or listening in to the audio feed, reading the weekly bulletin emails, getting copies of the sermons, or staying connected with your brothers and sisters about what is going on... or even just building those connections by having a coffee meeting, getting your kids together to play, offering some babysitting, or getting together for dinner... at Bolero!

Additionally, you can connect by gathering together for Men's Breakfast, or Women's group. You could come out and join us for Prayer Team, come out to our social events, help out with property clean-up, or just come shovel snow with your pastor!

These are all things we can do to supplement gathering on Sundays and they help us stay connected – even when we have to be away or we can't be around every Sunday.

This is how we can know what the Body is doing, and let the rest of the Body know what one of its parts - you - is doing.

Because Brothers and sisters – the main point in all this is that its not normal for individual parts of Christ’s Body to be **disconnected** from the rest of the Body – it is an aberration, not to mention that it makes it very difficult for the body to function properly and do the work for which Christ has chosen us, and commanded us – Go! Make disciples of all nations...

And Brothers and sisters all the emphasis on gathering together in this sermon series, all the learning about what connects us together as a Christian community, all the encouragement to believe it, act on it and the exhortation to make Sunday worship a priority...

This is all about being obedient to Christ. It’s all about getting on board with His plan for us – as a group - and allowing the Holy Spirit to show us the things which are preventing us from gathering together regularly – and empower us and change us so that we can get past them... so that we can take action to be intentional about gathering together.

And Brothers and sisters if there’s one thing you need to believe from this message this morning, about being part of the church, it’s that - **you** make the difference – you, personally, individually... you make the difference between the Body of Christ functioning well... or having to make do and get by in our work because we’re missing a body part.

Not because we believe in the ideology of inclusion... not because it sounds inspirational and I’m saying this to make you feel good about yourself and important. It’s because the scripture states the truth about us as a church in 1 Cor 12:18 saying *“God has placed the parts in the body – every one of them, just as He wanted them to be”*

So we realize that the Body won’t function properly without its God-ordained, God-chosen parts – and the fact is that each of you are one of those parts – so you need to show up.

And the difference between this scriptural belief and the ideology of inclusion is highlighted when Paul specifies in

verse 13 that the parts of the body are those people who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

While the church welcomes all to hear the message and the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, there is a transition that everyone must go through from being, as Paul says in vs. 2, *“pagan, and influenced and led astray by idols..”* to being able to confess *“Jesus is Lord”* They’ve been discipled. You become a part of the Body as you go through this process.

So if you’re wondering – am I a part of the Body, am I a body part that God has chosen to be here at Valleyview? Am I baptized by the Holy Spirit?

Well Brothers and sisters - If you believe Jesus is the Son of God, if you are convicted of your sins and you turn to Jesus for forgiveness and new life – If you confess Jesus as your Lord... then yes you are baptized by the Holy Spirit and you are becoming a part of the Body of Christ - God is placing you as a part in Christ’s Body with a particular purpose and plan.

And further more – if believing in Jesus, receiving His grace and forgiveness for your sin is causing you to be more gracious to others, more loving, more gentle, more kind...

If you’ve noticed that experiencing this grace and forgiveness in your life has enable you to do things for others that results in them having faith in Christ, or their faith is growing and being strengthened in someway...

Then not only are you a part of the Body of Christ – you are showing the fruit of the Spirit, and you are on your way to being able to identify what part God has planned for you play in the Body.

You are discovering your “charismata” – your grace-gift, what we typically have call a “spiritual gift” since it results from the work of the Holy Spirit.

You are “manifesting” the Holy Spirit - as Paul says in vs. 7, and this is more evidence that you’ve been Baptized by the Spirit and are a part of the Body of Christ.

And that is the main point this morning Brothers and sisters – that the Body of Christ needs **ALL** its parts, it can't function with just the prominent parts, it can't get by on most of its parts, it needs all its parts **together**... we're better together...

I think we get the point don't we.

So now we need to ask what causes some of our body parts to go missing? And we need to ask that, because if we don't – it makes it harder for the Holy Spirit to point out what we need to deal with so that we can become fully functioning body parts or how to encourage others - who are often missing.

Brothers and sisters, so often the cause of missing body parts is abuse and misuse. We touched on the fact that people can experience abuse in church in last weeks message, as one of the reasons why people might leave a local church to go to another one – or more likely... just stop attending completely. It's pretty easy to understand how abuse cuts people off from the body of Christ, and would make them hesitant to fully reconnect to another church later on.

Now abuse in the Church is a terrible horrible thing, even just people having bad experiences in church is something that we don't like to hear happening – but the good news is that just like a human body, Christ's body has healing capacity, and parts of the body that have been injured this way can be healed and rejoin the Body... IF the body parts responsible for healing are not absent... you might have a healing part to play!

And it's no different for body parts that are misused. It's like repetitive motion injury that occurs when you do the same thing over and over again, in the wrong way. You end up hurting part of your body and you don't even see it coming – its just all of a sudden you've got a pain in your shoulder, or your knee or your wrist hurts and you can't use it anymore.

Brothers and sisters, misuse of the body of Christ happens when we recruit people simply to fill positions and get work done... as opposed to shepherding followers of Jesus Christ to grow in grace and discover what they are suddenly able to do now that they've experienced Christ's forgiveness – their grace gift – which can serve others and help their faith grow.

On the surface it may look like the same thing, but it's very different... as the end results show.

Perhaps you've experienced being "volun-told" and "signed-up" to help out in a ministry or a committee in a church... and before you knew it you were swamped with responsibilities and duties and it was overwhelming and exhausting and it totally drained you and left you feeling burned out and you had to quit and everyone was disappointed with you etc....

I know of people who have experienced that years ago – and that is why they only show up every so often – because they were a misused body part, and they aren't going to let that happen again so they only attend sporadically.

On the other hand I know people who are willing to put in long hours of service, who re-adjust their schedule to fit ministry in, and who do this year in and year out and find that they are recharged from doing this. Because... things go well when we use our body as it was designed and meant to be used – and it's the same for the Church body.

That's the difference between filling positions with volunteers vs. helping those baptized by the Holy-Spirit discover their "grace-gifts" so they know which Body part they are to be.

So here at Valleyview, we won't fill a position with a volunteer, we will even leave it open and even go without – until that person who God has purposed to serve Valleyview with their gift starts to come regularly and becomes part of the body – maybe that's you!?! And this can take longer, but the end result is that other body parts don't go missing from misuse.

But misuse can also occur outside of Body, but its **US** misusing ourselves in ways that are disobedient not only to God's laws, but contradict His plans for us to be Holy – set apart.

And when we do this, we start to feel awkward gathering with His Body. It only reminds us we're living in disobedience and that we need to repent and change that and we're resisting that - so we avoid gathering, make excuses not to go, and we become missing body parts.

So, if you can relate to being a missing body part – whether it's from abuse or misuse, this is a word from the Lord Jesus to encourage you this morning, this is why you're not missing this morning. Let Jesus' Body help you heal so you can be a part of the Body again. Just come talk to me about how that can happen and we'll go from there... You're a part of the Body and Jesus wants all the parts of His Body.

But - I think the biggest reason that that body parts end up going missing is because of the don'ts; people just don't believe they are part of the body in this way, they don't know what their part is supposed to be.

So Brothers and sisters, I pray that the Holy Spirit will use what we've covered so far in this message to help us truly believe that we really are Body parts in Christ's body, that we each make a significant difference in Valleyview just getting by, or being a fully effective Body in making disciples.

And I pray that the scripture passage will help us understand that you have a distinct and particular part that God has

designed you for, and its needed... Because as Paul says in vs. 17 *"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?"*

So let this speak to any sense that you might have that you might feel you're not really needed – or not important, not like the pastor, or worship leaders or elders...

Brothers and sisters, it's so obvious that **each** of us and **all** of us make up the parts of the Body of Christ. But this means we ought to know what our own and each other's grace-gifts are – as that actually determines if we are ears or eye or hands or whatever...

So Brothers and sisters take some time and reflect on these questions over the coming week to help you determine if you have some of the grace gifts listed in our scripture passage and in other parts of the New Testament.

So - as a result of being forgiven for your sins, and experiencing the grace of Jesus - do you find that you are able

to; speak to other people about what God wants to do in their lives? You have the gift of prophecy.

Are you able to serve others in a humble way that models Jesus? You have the gift of Servanthood. Are you able to explain the Christian faith and scriptures in a way that helps people follow Jesus? You have the gift of teaching.

Are you able to inspire and comfort, strengthen and motivate people in what they are doing to serve other, and to endure trials as a Christian? You have the gift of encouragement.

Are you able to give financially and of your possessions in a selfless manner to model Jesus? With no strings attached and no expectations. You have the gift of giving.

Do you find yourself mentoring individual believers as a role model, helping them mature in Christ? You have the gift of nurturing leadership. Do you act with mercy and compassion to people who don't deserve it - because of Christ's mercy? You have the gift of Mercy

Are you able to determine what Godly decisions should be made for day-to-day situations? You have the gift of Wisdom. Are you able to share insights about your relationship Jesus in a way that deepens others' relationship with him? You have the gift of Knowing.

Can you believe and trust God's promises will come through, against all the odds and circumstantial evidence? You have the gift of Faith. Do you find that you are able to pray and speak and people are healed from disease, brokenness, illness – just like as Jesus did? You have the gift of Healing

Do you find that amazing miracles happen when you pray and speak, things which defy the laws of nature and show Jesus' power? Then you have the gift of miracles.

Are you able to determine intentions and the source of things as being truly from Jesus? You have the gift of discernment. Do you speak in a heavenly language? Then you have the gift of tongues, and can you understand what others are saying in a heavenly language? Then you have the gift of interpretation.

Do you desire to go and start new ministries and gospel initiatives where none exist? You have the gift of Apostleship. Do you somehow sense the exact time to show up and offer help to someone? You have the gift of Helping.

Or do you see where God's people should go and know the way to get them there? You have the gift of Visionary and Managing Leadership. Do you embody the message of the gospel of Jesus and share it freely and have people respond in faith when you do? You have the gift of evangelism.

Finally – are you concerned for the church? That all of its body parts are present and accounted for and do you work to protect the body from that which will harm it and keep it nurtured and healthy? You have the gift of Shepherding.

Brothers and sisters these are the twenty grace gifts that we find in the scriptures – and these grace gifts are how the Holy Spirit arranges us in the Body of Christ in our different roles...

So, the question now becomes – Who is missing here at Valleyview? And what parts might God have planned for them to play? Discernment? Evangelism? Mercy? Giving? Miracles?

Brothers and sisters, we need all these body parts for the body, so we can be effective in our work of making disciples, and serving Jesus Christ in worship as a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

So let's not only ask the Holy Spirit to show us what our grace gifts are... but who needs our texts, phone calls and encouragements because they've kind of gone missing. But that's not God's plan for them, they actually are an important body part of Christ's Body here at Valleyview.

Let's keep an eye out for each other - no missing body parts here at Valleyview... We're better together, Amen?

Let's pray