

**Body Language**  
**1 Corinthians 12: 12-31**  
**Ann Hatfield**

Let me preface this opening story with an emphatic declaration. In NO WAY is this illustration a commentary on our congregational meeting held last Sunday! With that disclaimer out of the way, here is the story:

Once upon a time, a set of carpenter's tools held a conference. Of course, the Hammer presided over the meeting. Several other tools suggested the Hammer leave the conference, because she was much too noisy. In response, the Hammer insisted, "If I must leave, then the Sandpaper also should go. He is so rough, and always rubbing people the wrong way."

To this the Sandpaper replied, "If you wish I'll go, but the Plane also must leave. All her work is on the surface. Her efforts have no depth."

The Plane spoke up. "Very well I'll leave, but the Tape Measure will also have to withdraw. He is always measuring folks, as though he were the only one who is right."

Amid this animated discussion, in walked the Carpenter of Nazareth, ready to start His day's work. Putting on His apron, He began to construct a pulpit from which to proclaim the gospel. He measured; He used the hammer, the sandpaper, the plane, and many, many other tools. When the pulpit was finished, the Saw finally spoke up, "It took Jesus himself to get us to do something all together!"<sup>1</sup>

Isn't that the truth! Only with divine intervention do all of us realize we are workers, who can work together for the Lord.

Perhaps paradoxically, the real strength of our unity as the body of Christ comes not from uniformity – not from all of us being hammers, for example – but rather from diversity – each of us employing the unique gifts God has given to us, because we all belong to the One who holds it all together. Unity and diversity are not contradictory terms. It takes a vast variety of gifts for us to function properly and well as one body.

There are many groups in which every part does something different to make the combined effort successful. For instance, unity is heard when a choir of many, unique voices – singing multiple parts – blend together to sing one, harmonious anthem. Unity

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie B. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*, adapted from *Illustrations Unlimited*, 232.

is experienced when multiple parts of our own bodies work together – perfectly synchronized – to allow us to walk, run, or simple shake hands.

Today's scripture lesson is perhaps the most well-known illustration of the unity of the church. In his letter to the faithful followers in Corinth, the Apostle Paul writes about the church as the body of Christ. This image is a wonderfully familiar reminder of our interconnectedness and interdependency with one another. You may not know, however, that Paul was not the first person to illustrate the body's essential unity as being derived from many and varied parts.

Ancient Greek and Roman orators also used the body metaphor as a way to talk about civic, social, and political life. Politicians spoke of the state or empire as a body, with its citizens having different parts to play. Interestingly though, these ancient orators stressed that different parts deserved different status. To them, some jobs were more important than others: more honorable, more valuable, more prestigious. This relegates some parts and functions to being disreputable, disgraceful, or even dispensable.

In the first century, Paul's audience in Corinth was prepared to hear about members having higher and lower status. They expected Paul to explain a hierarchy of gifts, skills, and jobs – even and perhaps especially within the body of Christ.

In contrast, Paul insists that every member – EVERY MEMBER – is just as indispensable – and grace-filled – as any other. There is no question of relative importance in Christ's body. Each member is equally valued.

For Paul, our unity in the body of Christ has deep significance. He writes, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (vs. 27). This is not a random illustration. The church is where we learn to reflect and bear the image of Christ in the world.

In his daily devotions, Franciscan priest Richard Rohr recently offered a critique of the early church creeds. Just as we recited in the Apostles' Creed earlier, Rohr says we make a huge leap from Jesus being "born of the Virgin Mary" to "....suffered under Pontius Pilate." Just one little comma marks the entire scope of Jesus' life and ministry. There is no mention of his teaching, his healing, his parables, his miracles.<sup>2</sup>

The creed seems to emphasize the theological meaning and doctrinal affirmation of Jesus' birth and death, and ignores all the things he did and said during his lifetime. As followers of Jesus, the Apostles' Creed offers little guidance on our day-to-day behavior towards others. Which begs the question, "What's a body to do???"

Research on human body language suggests we probably communicate more non-verbally than we do verbally. Yes, words are important, but our postures, facial gestures, and tone of voice communicate information, as well. Actions can speak louder than words.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr, Center for Action and Contemplation, Daily Devotional for January 23, 2019.

Just as it is with the human body, so it is also true for the body of Christ. How we treat one another, how we demonstrate our unity in Christ, and how we reflect the image of God in the world, these all matter. In this passage, Paul reminds us of our interrelatedness: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (vs. 26).

Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ is a vision of a body of people, who care for one another and share the work of God in and for the world.<sup>3</sup>

There is an old legend, which says,

when Jesus ascended into heaven, the angel Gabriel asked him, "Lord, you must have suffered terribly for people down there."

"I did," Jesus said.

"And," continued Gabriel, "do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?"

"Oh, no," said Jesus, "not yet. Now only a handful of people in Palestine know."

Gabriel was perplexed. "Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them? What plans have you made for carrying on your ministry in the world?"

Jesus responded, "I have asked Peter, James, John, Mary, and Martha, and a few more friends to tell other people about me and carry on my ministry. Those who are told will in turn tell more people about me, and my story will be spread to the farthest reaches of the earth. Ultimately, all humankind will know about my life and love, and they will share the work of God together."

Gabriel frowned, looked rather skeptical, and asked, "What if Peter is so busy with his nets and Martha so consumed by her housework and the other friends are so preoccupied they all forget to tell their friends and demonstrate your love? What's your "Plan B"?"

Jesus answered, "I haven't made any other plans. I am counting on them."

All of us are workers together for the Lord. Or as Paul describes us, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (vs. 27).

As we welcome new members today – members of this body, if you will – we do so trusting God has called these people to Westminster. God has given them unique gifts to share with us for our common good and for strengthening and building up this local expression of Christ's body.

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<sup>3</sup> Raewynne J. Whiteley, *Feasting on the Word*, 283.

Maybe one is a hammer; another a saw; another the sandpaper to smooth out some rough places. Who knows how the Carpenter wants to use them? But in joining Westminster, these new members join a healthy, active, and vibrant congregation full of energy and passion for ministry, as well as care and compassion for one another.

Together, we and they will see that if one member suffers, all suffer together with him; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with her. We are the vital organs and limbs of the body of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit – together – we become a visible witness of the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, and the loving heart of God. For we ALL belong to that Master Carpenter, who loves us and uses each one of us to accomplish His purposes.

May it be so.  
Amen.