

SERMON: "JOYFUL FOR ... COMMUNITY IN CHRIST'S BODY"
TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT ROMANS 12:9-21
NEW TESTAMENT 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26

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INTRODUCTION

One of the things I most appreciate about this church is something I see in so many of our older members so very often – how they keep on learning keep growing (life-long learners). Admit it. It is a temptation as we get older to get really set (as in stuck) in our ways, get grumpy, think the world is going you know where in a handbasket. I don't hear much of that from y'all.

You have been modeling for me (and many others in this place for everyone) the intentionality of learning something new every day. Here's what I've been learning lately, especially as I had all my kids in town last weekend
Sophie Ann, my oldest daughter from New York City, my two sons –
Durham from Greensboro, Jerry and his husband Alex from Asheville
I've been learning how to stay connected as family

It takes practice and patience to stay connected. Leading up to this weekend Beth and I talked about how much to schedule and how to let things just happen We talked about meals – what to eat, where to eat (I already know I'm going to drive her nuts when I retire always talking about the next meal). It was so good to be together. It had been several years since we were last together

I know it is different with different families – some scattered all over who don't get together that often, some nearby who see each other quite often
Here are a few things I've learned about staying connected with family.
One, it's not about me. It is about us. My kids were here not just to see me, but to see each other. I've learned to sit back and enjoy their interaction

Another lesson is about cell phones. I've learned to accept them.
I am thankful we stay off our phones when we eat together. That is good.
I've had plenty of good conversations with my kids (in their 20's and 30's) while their eyes are on their phones (and even with their fingers moving) and they are still engaged with me in conversation. They can do that

I guess their phones are part of their body, connected to them.
I wonder if Paul would mention phones in his talk about being the body of Christ if he were writing his letter to the Corinthians today. He names several body parts and their possible conversations with each other. He might add ...
"The cell phone cannot say to the hand I have not need of you"

SELF-TALK

First Paul talks about us having a variety of gifts, then he uses the imagery of us as the body of Christ to get that point across – about diversity and unity.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body.

The image of the body used by Paul in our New Testament letter was a familiar one to the original audience of this letter. Human society was often compared to the human body ... but not in the way Paul would use that analogy

This figure of speech was ordinarily used to urge members of subordinate classes to stay in their places and not upset what was understood to be the natural equilibrium of the body that is human society

Not anymore, Paul tossed aside that whole pecking order worldview
Paul dared to use the image of the church as the body of Christ
to talk about our all being connected to and dependent upon one another

He redefined what it means to be well-connected. Christ did and still does!
Paul talks about how each part of the body, in order to work as intended, must recognize its own value ... and the value of the other parts.
The way it is written, it is the parts of the body doing the talking
talking first to themselves (self-talk) and then to one another

Given all that inter dialogue, I thought I'd talk this morning about how we talk
How we talk to ourselves. How we talk to and about each other.
Given that focus (on our talk) we might learn something new today
something about staying connected ... which is a very good thing

You ever talk to yourself, maybe even in front of a mirror?
You ever have questions about being good enough, whether or not you belong?
Haven't we all at one time or another? In these verses the foot and ear
looking at the hand and the eye, question their place, their value
Paul lets them, lets us, know we are all needed – we all play a part

TRASH TALK?

We need a kind of self-talk that reminds us of our value

We may not get the PR that the hand and eye get. But they don't get that PR without the feet and ears doing their thing. We need each other
Sermons and songs need mouths ... and ears and hearts and minds.

Staying connected can include saving money to take seven people out for prime rib
It can take layovers, delays and missed flights. It takes patience with stories told that you've heard many times before and patience with cellphones.

You know what else it takes? You - You knowing you belong, You knowing how valuable you are. You knowing how much you are needed

And what else, who else, does it takes? Them

I just love how the conversation in these verses turns from positive self-talk to a critique of trash talk, of talking down to the other parts of the body

As it is, there are many members yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Have you noticed that Santa often drops off gifts and leaves the assembly to us?

And with instructions that can be a little confusing, lots of parts, lots of parts.

Maybe you're like me. You've put something together and somehow

ended up with a part of two left over. Are these spares, just in case?

Or did you miss a step somewhere between part Q and part double G?

God, in calling us together and keeping us together, does not leave anyone out

like that extra part sitting on the floor of your den at 1:00 a.m. on Christmas Eve

Every part is needed. Every part plays its part. The eye cannot say to the hand

"I have not need of you" because it needs the hand. We need each other.

There are no spare parts, no spare people.

That's how God arranges us – to go together, to suffer together, rejoice together

That's what Paul says here ... **that there may be no dissension within the body,**

but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member

suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice

together with it.

SUMMARY

Does our talk about others – others in this church, in this community, in this country, in this world sound like that? No dissension? Caring for one another?
Suffering together, rejoicing together? Or do we sound like that eye
uppity enough to think and act and talk like it doesn't need the hand?
Can't we do better in how we talk to and about other parts of the body?

Staying connected as family, as church, as community takes work
including self-talk and talk amongst ourselves ... but it's not really about our work
Again, like previous sermons in this series, I want to bring it back to being joyful
This series is about joy because life itself, life in Christ, is about joy
And that includes understanding that our connections are a gift

We are the body of Christ, period. Much more than a collection of individuals, or individual churches, we are one people. We are all in this together.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German theologian who was killed because of his opposition to Adolf Hitler, wrote a wonderful book about Christian community entitled, Life Together. This is what he says about being the body of Christ.

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

We are connected to Christ and to one another. We are in this together
because God calls us together and keeps us together. We are the body of Christ
connected to and dependent upon one another. That is by design, by God's design.

Another thing I learned this weekend with all my kids together again for the first time in several years, a lesson about staying connected ... a lesson about sadness.
It hit me Monday morning after I dropped them off at the Cedar Rapids airport.
I felt this sudden sense of sadness that often goes with saying "good-bye"
It caught me by surprise then ... but looking back it makes sense, natural.

You know sometimes sadness can lead to self-pity, feeling sorry for yourself
I felt that coming my way like the swell of a wave. It stuck around a little while
Maybe from the airport to the smell of crunchberries by Quaker Oats
It then got moved away like a receding wave by something much stronger
Gratitude lifted me up like the seventh wave – the one you wait to ride

Then I started thinking about this sermon, about staying connected
Positive self-talk is good, cleaning up our trash talk is good. Both helpful
But what helps the most with staying connected, more than cell phones even,
what helps with everything really, is starting with and sticking with gratitude.

I am so very thankful for the people God has connected me to ...
the ones who fly into town and take up a whole pew once every few years
the ones who just started visiting and are looking for a spot in the pews
and the ones who have their usual spots in the pews and have for a while
I am thankful. Please know I am joyful ... because I am connected to you!