

Sermon
9 February 2014
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Last year, in October, I had a carpal tunnel release operation in my left hand. And a couple of weeks ago I had the same operation in my right hand.

Hence my motivation for choosing today's Scripture reading! Paul says that the body is made up of many different parts, but that all the parts are equally important.

And after having this procedure done to my hand, I can testify to that!

It was only a small operation, and after all, how hard can it be to not be able to use your hand for a couple of weeks?! Very hard, let me tell you that!

Without giving it a single thought, we use both our hands every day to do millions of things. But take one hand out of the equation, and even simple, everyday tasks become a huge effort. Have you ever tried brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand? Or writing with

your non-dominant hand? Or have any of you ladies ever tried blow drying your hair, or as a plan B, pulling up your hair in a ponytail with only one hand? Or hanging out the washing, ironing, cooking, doing the dishes, dressing your children, typing... The list is endless.

I've never appreciated my hands more, or understood this passage in 1 Corinthians 12 better, than I do just now.

Every single part of your body is important; it's there for a reason. And Paul explains this in such a way that even children can understand it. He says that the eye cannot say to the hand: I do not need you; because whether the eye likes it or not, he *needs* the hand. Because if the whole body was an eye – how would it be able to touch, to hear, to walk, to talk?

And although all the different parts have different functions and look different from each other, they are all equally important, because if even only 1 of these parts weren't there, the whole body would suffer.

Thus – every single part is important and dependent on one another, in order for the body to be fully functional and effective.

Then Paul goes on to apply this metaphor to the church. The church in Corinth was made up of very many different kinds of people. In those days Corinth was a big cosmopolitan city, with an important harbour.

Because there was a harbour, lots of different people from different countries, with different nationalities, cultures, and customs could reach this city by boat. Some of them stayed only for a short time, but others made Corinth their home.

This meant that in this one city, there lived wealthy people and poor people, people who thought they were very clever and important, and people with low self esteem, people with a Jewish background and people who had a gentile upbringing, people who have been Christians for a very long time, and people who have just recently committed themselves to Christ.

Which meant that the church in Corinth also consisted of a percentage of all of these different people.

And although this might sound like just any ordinary collection of people in any city today – to have people from so many different backgrounds grouped together in one place, wasn't very common in Biblical times – mainly because it wasn't easy to travel.

It's quite easy to understand, then, that with people from so many different backgrounds, they might have sometimes struggled to get along, and they probably misunderstood each other every so often.

By means of this passage Paul is trying to describe to them that although they are different, they are all there for a reason, and they all have a function to fulfil. So in the 1st place – nobody should think

that they are more important than anybody else, because they're not; and in the 2nd place – everybody should do their part, because otherwise the church wouldn't be able fulfil its function on earth.

In other words, Paul urged them to be patient with each other, to be understanding, not to judge, not to think too highly or lowly of themselves, to be considerate to others and to be the best they can be. Basically to love and respect each other. And to use their gifts and talents in such a way that the church would benefit from it.

And this definitely wasn't always easy, but if *everybody* just tried their very best at doing what *they* were supposed to do, and *only* that, their church would be a beacon of hope to the rest of the community, a place where searching people could find peace and rest, and consequently – faith.

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Although Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth many many years ago – I think it could just as well have been addressed to us, today.

Because every single thing he says in this passage is true in regards to our church here in West Calder/Polbeth too.

There are people here who were born and bread in this village, and then there are *incomers*, like me. We have all had different upbringings; we have different values, interests, hobbies. Some of us

were raised as Christians and other chose to join the church later in life. But all of us are here for a reason.

If I've said it once, I've said it a million times – I don't believe in chance. There is a *reason* why *you* are a part of *this* church. God wants you here. Whatever *your* reason for coming to church on a Sunday – it's God's Spirit who motivates you to come here. Because you have a role to fulfil:

- You might be the eyes, who need to see how we as a church can make a difference in the world;
- you might be the mouth, who need to tell people about God's love;
- you might be the hands, who need to help people up;
- you might be the feet, that need to walk us in the right direction;
- or, you might be the *kidneys*, the *liver*, the *lungs*, the *spine*, the *heart* – parts that are not seen by others, but without whom the rest of the body will not be able to function. Without whom the rest of the body might die – as a matter of fact.

And precisely because of this – not a single one of us is more important than the other – we just all have *different* functions to fulfil. So whatever it is that you have to do here – do it well, because if you don't, the whole body of Christ will suffer. *It's hard to only have 1 hand, if you really need 2.*

We need to be a beacon of hope to our surrounding community – to all the searching people out there. But we won't be able to be a place of peace and rest to others, if we bicker and talk badly of each other and not support and love one another. We need to remember that we are different for a reason. But although we are all different, we have the same goal, and we can only accomplish that goal if we work together – like a fit and healthy body.

So let's see and hear and think and feel and sing and dance and listen and run and embrace and sit and stand and cheer and whisper and breath with everything in us... Because if we just do our best, God will do the rest.

Amen