

Readings: 1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 31; Luke 4. 14-21

We continue thinking about God's love for us as shown in Jesus and how we then show this love to others. In our reflections today we consider how that love for others influences the way that we act together as a body.

We all have a body and recognise that our bodies are subject to ageing and failure. Many years ago the Scottish comedian Billy Connolly noted that as he got older his body reacted differently. Somewhere between 35 and 40 years, he spotted that when he bent down to pick something up, he involuntarily let out a noise "oof!" Or when he sat down, he let out a sigh. In these last couple of years, our experience of working from home has shown us how different parts of our bodies have struggled with different postures.

No matter how much we might think of ourselves internally as a youngster, as we age our bodies start to suffer until we are no longer capable of activity. The bible reminds us that God gives us life and can breathe new life into us by his spirit. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied to a valley full of dry bones and God's spirit came to bring them back to life. God raised a new army from tired old, dried bones.

I am sure that many of us will remember singing the old "spiritual" based on this passage of Ezekiel – speaking to the head bones connected to the neck bone all the way down to the toe bones connected to the foot bone. It is this interconnectedness that Paul emphasises in 1 Cor 12, our reading for this morning.

Just as the hip bone is connected to the backbone and so on, so each of us in the family of the church, the Body of Christ, is connected one to another. It is that very interconnectedness that gives strength to the life of the church. But like a human body it requires each section or person to play its part in the life of the church. Just as any family or organisation needs different members to function properly so too does the church.

When each one plays their part in the family of the church, it becomes stronger and more able to face the challenges of daily life. The strength of hands held keeps us safe and can provide a secure means of bearing burdens. This is also a means of linking together like a chain.

With a sure anchor, even the largest of vessels can be held secure to the seabed. When we ourselves are anchored to Jesus then we can be secure in our faith and more able to help and support others and keep them close to the family.

Our human cells link together to pass messages round the body and to allow for reactions to stimulus and to help us avoid danger. (Slide 6) But our cells have very specific purposes that have developed over the centuries for particular functions. Some pass chemical messages between nerve cells or the digestive system. Others are connective tissue holding muscles to bone. Others for the systems for moving our bodies. We can see how these work in our bodies and we are all familiar with the various reactions of our human structure like the knee jerk reaction.

It is to these human analogies that Paul refers when encouraging the members of the church in Corinth to work together. Earlier in the chapter he has stressed the important roles that people play in the life of the church, apostles, teachers,

prophets, administrators and so on. They are not separate but interconnected. The roles are equally important and provide complete functionality to the body of Christ. Just as the human body needs each of its constituent parts, so too does the church. For the church to work as a whole body, showing the love of Christ to a needy world, each member needs to play their part. Each is essential.

By now, most of us are aware that Jonathan is leaving at the end of March. This means that the burden of ensuring the mission and ministry of the body of Christ falls back on other members of the church family. Although many things will continue as before, the direction and leadership that Jonathan has given will fall on the shoulders of the churchwardens. They will need our prayers and our active support.

Each of us will have parts to play in the transition from Jonathan's rectorship to that of the next minister. Each of us will have responsibilities and functions that will be necessary for that next stage of the spiritual journey of our churches. It is the interconnectedness of which Paul speaks to the Corinthians which will sustain and support us in the weeks and months ahead.

Everyone of us is important; everyone is needed; everyone has a part to play. In our unity and connections is the strength of the local church. By supporting each other and keeping each other's needs before God, we will be able to come through the time between Jonathan's departure and the appointment of a new rector stronger and more determined to engage in mission than we are now. But we will need prayer, dedication and a willingness to see and support each other's gifts and contribution.