

Making it Work
1 Cor 12:24-26 James 5:13-16

Friends I had a couple of other titles in mind for this last message in our series about what it means for us to be together as a church.

I considered calling it “Membership has its benefits” but then I thought, no... that might give the wrong impression that being a member of Christ’s body is more like being a member of a Country Club that exists to cater to you – its not really an accurate illustration for the church.

And then I thought maybe I should call it “Bodily Functions” but then I started thinking about all the crude, off-color jokes and comparisons which that title could conjure up and I figured – probably not a good idea...

But it was closer to the point which I believe Christ wants us to take away from this message series – that each of us needs to discover and pursue the role we are created to play as parts of His body if His body is going to function.

So in the end I settled on calling it “Making It Work!” because what we’ve heard about in this series isn’t simply for the purpose of gaining more head-knowledge about the church – its about gaining more understanding so that it leads to doing – to help us be what Christ intends us to be – to make the Body work.

Friends there’s a tragic story about a ship’s doctor who after many years of treating only scrapes and bruises, seasickness and hangovers finally gets a chance to put his more advanced medical skills to use when a crew member comes down with appendicitis.

So he gathers a team of people to help him, preps the patient, gets him on the operating table and begins to perform the surgery – however He becomes so engrossed in explaining all the technical details of this surgery and the showing how the different parts of the body are supposed to work to his helpers that the patient ends up dying...

So friends, we’ve spent some time learning about being together as the body of Christ, coming to understand what the

different parts of the body are, and being challenged to make being together a priority, being challenge to make a commitment to belong...

but unless this all comes to life for us and we Be the Body – unless we Make it Work – its just a lifeless collection of parts – a Franken-Church.

But the good news friends is that scripture gives us illustrations of what it looks like when the body works – and because the scripture is the living Word of God – and as we hear the scripture describe how the Body functions and meditate on it - the Holy Spirit moves among us to give life to this collection of different parts and brings us to life – together as Christ’s Body.

And the descriptions we read about this morning have to do with being a healthy body, not just an active body, an important distinction - so I want to start off by looking at verse 24b from 1 Cor 12.

Paul writes *“God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,”*

So what comes to mind when we think about the Body of Christ functioning as it should?

It’s probably easy to picture the Church gathering for worship, raising support for a PWS&D relief project, running Inn from the Cold, or helping out some way in our community...

Or perhaps in your mind a Church that is working well is a church that has a vision, and clearly defined goals, well run programs staffed with trained volunteers...

ahem - excuse me...Spirit filled body parts, and administratively it has its finances are in order, its meets the budget and takes good care of its facilities and property...

Truth be told these things are what I often think about when I imagine a Church that is working well.

But Paul tells us that in God’s design of the body greater honor is given to the parts that lack it. And all these things we just mentioned are the obvious, high profile, glamorous functions

of a church – just like the high profile parts of our body are our face, our hair, our legs and arms – they get all the attention.

Now how often do you think about your body's immune system? Or how often do you think about your bowels?

Not very often right... when was the last time you said “I can't go out with my bowels looking like this... or I'm having a bad immune system day”

But, if you've ever had a problem with your immune system or your bowels you know how important they are to your body and how important it is that they work well.

You see friends, in the Body of Christ God has given greater honor to the functions which are not up front and glamorous like mission work... because without these functions the church will not be healthy enough to do things like mission work.

So what are these bodily functions which have been given greater honor?

Well friends, James 5:13-16 identifies the functions of healing and confession. 1 Cor 10:13 speaks about dealing with temptation together and thus identifies accountability.

And in the larger context of Matthew 18 Jesus is speaking about forgiveness means that we must interpret the promises in verse 19-20 as speaking about the function of reconciliation.

And these are so necessary friends because the truth about being church together is that if one of our members is suffering – it affects all of us. We may not like that, we may wish it was different, that we weren't so connected - but it's very clear in the scripture that if one part suffers; every part suffers with it...

Now don't go thinking this means you need to put up a good front like everything is ok in your life when the church gathers together, or that you should only show up when everything is going well so you aren't the wet-blanket.

Instead if you are suffering, you need to gather together with the body – because your burden can be distributed among us – you don't have to go through it all by yourself.

The rest of the body can come along side of you to perform the Body's functions of healing, confession, accountability and reconciliation to restore you to back to health.

This is why James instructs us in his letter *"Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord."*

Friends please note the encouragement James directs to the people who make up the body to take the initiative to let the leadership of the church know what is going on in their lives.

"let **them** call the elders..."

You see friends; this is at the heart of making it work. If we all take responsibility to connect together as the body Christ has designed us to be – this can work, the body can function.

If we don't – the body functions of healing, confession, accountability and reconciliation won't be able to work properly

At best people will feel neglected and uncared for and feel like the only time they hear from the leadership is when they need help for something like missions.

At worst a problem or an issue that is causing someone to suffer will fester and get worse until it blows up and causes more collateral damage to other parts of the body – perhaps even doing damage to the mission of the church – and it will become another story on a web-site of why people believe in God but feel they don't need the church.

So friends the encouragement to us here... is for **all** of us to take responsibility to make the body work – let our leaders, let our Christian friends, let our small groups, our ministry leaders whomever know what is going on in our lives that needs healing, confession, accountability or reconciliation.

Now – we're not used to that. We have been socialized to do things differently; we are accustomed to dealing with things like sickness, temptation, and our sins in private, on our own, by ourselves.

And if we have an issue with someone, if they have offended us we just withdraw and back away from them – and we’re comfortable with things this way.

Fine – but the body of Christ can’t work this way – it’s not designed to just like our physical bodies aren’t. Can you imagine if we related to our physical bodies in the same way?

Well I guess some people do – my grandfather didn’t think to get himself checked up regularly by the doctor and when they discovered that he had prostate cancer it was too late in the game for the treatment to be effective.

So now we have advertising campaigns to raise awareness and take away the stigma associated with going to the doctor to keep an eye on your health.

Friends – consider this an advertising campaign for us to get over the stigma of coming together to deal with our sickness, our sins, our broken relationships and our temptations...

Dayna’s story is a wonderful example of what can happen in our lives if we are willing to do that.¹ She posted this online:

One of the things I have recently (within the year) been through is I quit smoking. (Gasp) I know- I have been a Christian most of my life, but those 10 years I spent out in the world developed some bad habits in me that God has and is dealing with in me. Smoking was the last thing I was holding on to from my past.

So when I quit smoking, a very good friend touched base with me every day. She held me accountable to a higher standard. She took me away from the stresses of the day and distracted me from my obsession. She reminded me that God had something for me that was better than the cigarette that in that moment I missed so much and was tempted to go back to. She prayed for me and she prayed with me.

For me it was smoking. For you it may be something else. I think that together we are stronger than we are apart. A 3-fold cord is not easily broken.

¹ <http://www.alanknox.net/2012/03/a-church-that-perseveres-through-temptation/>

You see while it may feel awkward and push us out of our comfort zone to make the Body work this way – in the end, it benefits us.

As Dayna said – for her it was smoking – for us it may be something else. And please don't buy into the myth that the Body of Christ is a group of "good" people – remember what brings us together is that we're all just forgiven sinners who still struggling with the reality of sin in our lives.

The reality that we can be bitter, proud, resentful, lazy... we can gossip, lie, cheat and steal... the reality that there are things that we would be ashamed to have others know about us.

But when the Body functions as it should friends and we can open up to each other about the reality of sin in our life - we can be assured that we've been forgiven of our sins, reconciliation is possible and we can gain victory over temptation.

But friends if we are going to make it work – we need to get off on the right foot. An overly aggressive immune system

which attacks the body is just as bad as one that doesn't work to defend it.

You see there are ways we must go about coming together in order for these functions to occur. For example with regards to reconciliation Jesus gives us some fairly specific instructions in Matthew 18.

He says "if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

Now the specifics of these instructions are not the focus of our message today – however do they illustrate to us that there is a process for dealing with things which make people suffer – in this case broken relationships –

and we must follow that process so we don't end up being like an overly aggressive immune system that attacks the body

So friends – as we close off this series and we want to put into action all that we’ve learned about being the body of Christ – If we want to “Make it Work” like it is supposed to...what’s the best way to do that?

Well that depends on where you are in the Valleyview solar system...

If you have just started to circle around the far edges of our community, you’ve just started to attend services here and you’re just getting to know us then rest assured that we don’t expect you to show up next week and bare your soul to us.

But, in a few weeks maybe you want to take the next step of giving me your contact info and we can make arrangement to get together for coffee.

And once we’ve had coffee a couple times, hopefully you’ll have gotten to know and trust me enough that we can have conversation about what sorts of things Christ is doing in your life and how Valleyview can help that continue and increase...

And if you are someone who runs a wide but regular orbit with Valleyview – you attend worship often and you know a few people in the church – maybe the next step for you is to begin to work at building some closer relationships with people here.

Stay around afterwards and have some coffee, stay for Souperbowl Sunday, go out to the pub after worship band practice... ask other people to share their story of how God brought them to Valleyview, share with them how you ended up here. That’s a good start to learn how to have the kind of spiritual conversation that makes the Body work.

And maybe you are in close orbit with Valleyview – almost right in the center of things. If you aren’t already in one - let me encourage you to consider being a part of a Christcare Group because these groups are designed to create the kind of intimate, trusting, caring community that helps us to share the kinds of things from which we need healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and accountability.

They are the best place to deal with it and the leaders are trained to handle it, so if you are in a CCG then I encourage

you to continue to grow in the depth of your sharing and caring for each other and make sure you respect and value the confidence your fellow members have in you.

And of course regardless of where you fall in the Valleyview solar system, you can never go wrong with calling up your minister and letting him know what's going on in your life,

or sending him an email to give a list of specific things that you would like to have prayer for, or just going for coffee because you've got something you need to get off your shoulders.

Because the more you connect with me the more I'm able to help facilitate connecting you to others who understand what you're dealing with and can support you.

So friends, those are some ways that we can *all* take some real steps forward in "Making it Work" and bringing the reality of the Body of Christ to life in our everyday lives.

And I want to close off this message with a little exercise that will help us realize how this affects all of us.

- Anyone who was sick this past week or month, stand up
- Anyone who had a family member, or someone they cared about who was sick this past week or month, stand up
- Anyone who felt guilty for doing something they knew was wrong, stand up
- Anyone who was tempted to do something Christ would not approve of, stand up
- Anyone who was offended by another person this week, or somehow offended someone else this past week, stand up
- Anyone who is lying about being sick, feeling guilty or being tempted or offending someone – you'd better stand up☺

Friends- we're all in this together, no temptation has overtaken us except what is common to all of us – we are not supposed to deal with these things in private anymore – Christ has placed us in the body, and joined us together as His body so that we can receive healing, experience forgiveness, overcome temptation and work towards reconciliation.

And as a show of solidarity towards each other that we understand this is Christ's intention for us, I invite you to stand shoulder to shoulder with each other as we pray for the Holy Spirit to work in us now and give us each the courage to “make it work”

Let's pray.