

Missing Body Parts
1 Corinthians 12:1-20

Brothers and sisters, what if in the coming week as Calgary enters phase one of reopening... people begin showing up for work as they normally would - but for some strange and mysterious reason each person happened to be missing some part of their body!

Employees would be converging on their workplace, gathering around the water cooler – keeping 6 ft apart - and maybe the conversation would go like this...

Hey Bob where's your hand? Oh – it decided to sleep in this morning... Where's your leg Steve?

Oh my leg? Well since I have two of them my left one figured that I didn't need both at the same time so it decided to take the day off.

Oh – I see – hey did you hear about Susan over in marketing?
No – what happened? Oh - She lost her head!

Really, again! Bummer, well I suppose she'll just have get by until she finds it – she really ought to look at getting that thing screwed on right.

Well look at the time – I suppose we ought to get started, is Williams coming in today for that presentation?

No – He just up and quit. Oh why? Well he said he didn't have the heart for it anymore...

Oh man – do we have a replacement for him yet?

Well HR is looking- but you know how difficult it is to keep an eye out... (Hahahaha)

And on and on it would go...and what would be even stranger is that everyone would consider this absence of body parts to be normal, when it's clearly ridiculous – and not to mention... prone to bad humor!

But friends, it's no laughing matter when it actually happens on Sunday mornings as the Church shows up and gathers together as the Body of Christ to pursue its calling to minister to each other and to our community.

We're missing body parts, and we've gotten so used to this we consider it to be normal.

Hey good to see you this morning, where's your family— Oh they're at a school function... Hey have you seen Linda recently? No... I think she's away for a few months... What about Louie? Oh he was here last week— I guess you must have missed him while you were away...

We all know how this goes right? We've all had these types of conversations...

Any maybe you've even greeted and welcomed someone you thought was a "new-comer" only to discover that they've actually been connected to Valleyview for twenty years — but

you've never seen them before! And the strange part is that we find this is normal in the church...

But friends, this morning our scripture passage from 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that it is not normal for Christians to connect with their Church only once in a while...

Only at Christmas and Easter... only once every few months... or maybe even just once a month...

The apostle Paul illustrates how we as individual followers of Jesus Christ are connected to each other by using the human body as an example — and thus the implication is that individual believers are not casually connected with each other — body parts don't simply show up every few months when they have a free weekend...

No friends, part of what Paul wants us to understand about the Body of Christ — The Church — is that each of us as individuals play a vital role in bringing it to life! Which means we need to be intentional about gathering together.

Now I understand our life circumstances might make it difficult for us to attend worship regularly, but the good news is this pandemic has forced us to develop our online capacity – and we will continue to have this option in the future as well, so if you are not able to attend worship in person, you will be able to come and attend online.

Plus... Sunday worship isn't the only opportunity to connect with the Body.

We have small groups, there is prayer group, we have a men's breakfast, we've distributed our contact and photo directories, so you can make a phone call, send an email, text somebody - just do something which helps you stay connected to us when you have to be away and helps the rest of us stay **connected** with you.

And many of us do these sorts of things in spite of your busy lifestyle and I commend you for it – It helps us all stay connected even when you must be away.

You want to know what the Body is doing and you want the rest of the Body to know what one of its parts is doing.

And Brothers and sisters -we need to understand and believe that it is not normal for individual parts of Christ's Body to be **disconnected** from the rest of the Body – it is an aberration, not to mention that it makes it very difficult for the body to function properly and do the work which Christ commanded – Go! Make disciples of all nations...

And all the emphasis on gathering together in this sermon series, all the learning about what connects us together as a Christian community, all the encouragement and exhortation to make Sunday worship a priority...

It's not about me trying to convince you to come more often so that attendance goes up, or that we have more people to run our programs...

Friends - I hope you understand, and you can see that it's all about being obedient to Christ so that we know what He is doing in our lives by connecting us together as his Body!

It's all about getting on board with His plan for us, and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us through the scriptures, and to challenge us about the things which are preventing us from gathering together regularly – so that we can get past them... so that we can take action to be intentional.

So if you take away one thing from the message this morning I hope we all realize – we make the difference – us personally and individually... we can each make the difference between the Body of Christ functioning well or having to get by – because its missing a body part.

And this is not because we believe in the power of the human spirit... it's not an inspirational kind of *"be the change you want to see"* message – it's simply you.... realizing the fact, as 1 Cor 12:18 says *"God has placed the parts **in** the body – every one of them, just as He wanted them to be"*

So you realize that the Body won't function properly without its God-ordained, God-chosen parts – and that you are one of those parts – so you need to show up.

And again – I need to qualify that this isn't a message of politically correct inclusivism - Paul is quite specific in verse 13 that the parts of the body are those people who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

So while the church welcomes all to hear the message and the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, there is a transition that everyone must go through from being, as Paul says in vs. 2, *"pagan, and influenced and led astray by idols.."* to being able to confess *"Jesus is Lord"*

You have to go through that process to become a part of the Body...

So perhaps you're wondering – am I a part of the Body, am I a body part that God has chosen to be here at Valleyview?

Well friends - If you believe Jesus is the Son of God, if you are convicted of your sins and you turn to Jesus for forgiveness and new life – If you confess Jesus as your Lord... then yes you are or are becoming a part of the Body of Christ.

And further more – if you are noticing that because of receiving this grace you seem to be more gracious to others, more loving, more gentle, more kind...

If you've noticed that experiencing this grace and forgiveness in your life enables you to do things for others that seem to result in their faith in Christ growing and being strengthened in some way...

Then not only are you a part of the Body of Christ – you are showing the fruit of the Spirit, and you are on your way to being able to identify what part you play in the Body.

You are discovering your “charismata” – your grace-gift, what we typically call a “spiritual gift”

You are “manifesting” the Holy Spirit - as Paul says in vs. 7, and that means you've been Baptized by the Spirit and are a part of the Body of Christ.

And that is the main point this morning friends – that the Body of Christ needs all its parts, it can't function with just the prominent parts, it can't get by on most of its parts, it needs all its parts **together**... we're better to-gather...

Well... I think we get the point don't we. And in our current circumstances we need to be reminded of this because it will become all too easy for us to get comfortable watching services in our living rooms, just listening to information when is it convenient for us – and to fall into observation instead of participation and re-engaging with each other as an important part of the Body of Christ when we can resume gathering in person.

But present circumstances aside – what else causes some of our body parts to go missing?

And we need to ask that, because if we don't – it makes it harder for the Holy Spirit to point out to us what we might need to deal with in our lives so that we can become fully functioning body parts or what we can do to encourage others who are often missing.

The sad truth is that often body parts are missing because of abuse and misuse. We touched on the abuse that people can experience in church in last week's message so you can go online and read about that if you want to, and I think it's easy for us to understand how abuse cuts people off from the body of Christ.

But misuse does the same thing. It's sort of like repetitive motion injury that occurs when you do the same thing over and over again in the wrong way – you end up hurting part of your body and you don't even see it coming – its just all of a sudden you've got a pain in your shoulder, or your knee or your wrist and you can't use it anymore.

And friends, misuse of the body of Christ happens when we recruit volunteers to fill positions to get work done...

as opposed to shepherding followers of Jesus Christ to grow in grace and discover what they are suddenly able to do now that they've experienced Christ's forgiveness – to serve others and help their faith grow.

On the surface it may look like the same thing, but it's very different... as the end results show.

Perhaps you've experienced being "volun-told" and "signed-up" to help out in some ministry or on a committee in a church... and before you knew it you were swamped with responsibilities and duties and it was overwhelming and exhausting and it totally drained you and left you feeling burned out and you had to quit and everyone was disappointed with you etc....

I know of people who have experienced that years ago – and that is why they only show up every so often – because they were a misused body part.

On the other hand I know people who are willing to put in long hours of service, who re-adjust their schedule to fit ministry in, and who do this year in and year out and find that they are recharged from doing this.

Things go well when we use our body as it was designed and meant to be used.

Brothers and sisters, that's the difference between filling positions with volunteers versus helping those who manifest the Holy-Spirit to figure out where they can best use their "grace-gifts" in the body.

So here at Valleyview, we will often go without someone to fill a volunteer position – ahem, excuse me a ministry position - until we can find a Spirit-filled Body Part who is God-

appointed to serve Valleyview with their gift. It takes longer but the result is body parts that don't go missing from misuse.

Friends It's so obvious to us that you wouldn't try to ice-skate on your hands, that you don't use your head to dribble a basketball, that you don't chew your food with your toes, or drink tea with your ears...

Each of us makes up the parts of the Body of Christ and it works the exact same way - which means we ought to know what our own and each other's grace-gifts are –

So brothers and sister I want to encourage you to reflect on these questions – especially in our present circumstances where our usual ways of being involved at church have been put on hold.

Ask yourself if as a result of the experience of being forgiven for your sins - do you find that you are able to...

tell other people what God wants to do in their lives? You have the gift of prophecy

serve others in a humble way that models Jesus? You have the gift of Servanthood

explain the Christian faith and scriptures to help people follow Jesus? You have the gift of teaching

Inspire and comfort and motivate and strengthen others to endure trials as a Christian? You have the gift of encouragement

Give financially and of your possessions in a selfless manner to model Jesus? You have the gift of giving

Mentor individual believers as a role model and help them mature in Christ? You have the gift of nurturing leadership

Do you act with mercy and compassion to people who don't deserve because of Christ? You have the gift of Mercy

Are you able to determine what Godly decisions should be made? You have the gift of Wisdom

Are you able to share insights about your relationship Jesus that deepens other's relationship with him? You have the gift of Knowing

Can you believe against all the odds that Jesus will keep his promises? You have the gift of Faith

Does God Heal people from disease, brokenness, illness when you pray for them like Jesus did? You have the gift of Healing

Do miracles happen – things which defy the laws of nature that show Jesus power? You have the gift of miracles

Are you able to determine intentions and the source of things as being truly from Jesus? You have the gift of discernment

Do you speak in a heavenly language? You have the gift of tongues, and can you understand what others are saying in a heavenly language? You have the gift of interpretation

Do you desire to go and start new ministries and gospel initiatives where none exist? You have the gift of Apostleship

Do you somehow sense the exact time to show up and offer help to someone? You have the gift of Helping

Do you see where God's people should go and know the way to get there? You have the gift of Visionary and Managing Leadership.

Do you embody the message of the gospel of Jesus and do people respond positively to that in you? You have the gift of evangelism.

Finally— are you concerned for the church? That all of its body parts are present and accounted for and do you work to

protect the body from that which will harm it and keep it nurtured and healthy? Then you have the gift of Shepherding.

Friends these twenty spiritual gifts that we find in the scriptures – these grace gifts – they are how the Holy Spirit arranges us in the Body of Christ in our different roles.

So, brothers and sisters, if our task as the Body of Christ is to go and make disciples of all nations - The question now becomes – do we have all the parts in place to pursue this work?

And there is no time better than the present time when our regular ways of doing things are temporarily interrupted for us to evaluate what we have been doing – and ask how it supports our job to make disciples, and if we are actually functioning according to the grace gift that the Holy Spirit has given us... do we know what Body part we are and are we showing up to be that part of the Body?

Well brothers and sisters – one of the ways we can evaluate this is to look at how effective Valleyview is in our task of making disciples?

Now that is not something we're going to be able to do this morning, but it is something that we'll be working on over the next few months – because this interruption of our regular activities is the perfect time to look at such things...

And we can all start on this together by taking some time in the coming week to consider what part of the Body of Christ we are supposed to be, and how we can work together towards making disciples.

And as you do that – make sure you are always remembering the grace and mercy Christ has given to you – to us – because being gifted to be a part of the Body flows out of how that Grace and forgiveness changes us.

Brothers and sisters – we are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. Amen.