

Series: Journey Deeper	Reference: 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 & various passages	Title: Body Parts	Date: 10.13.2019
Website Writeup: How is church community unique, how are you unique in it? What does it do for you, and what do you do for it? These are the questions we wrestle with in this sermon.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

This series follows along certain chapters of M. Robert Mulholland Jr.'s book, *Invitation to a Journey; A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. Much of these sermons will be reminiscent of, or sometimes direct quotes of his writings. I urge you to read along as we study this together.

For this series we're memorizing two short passages. Anyone brave enough to recite them? If you get them right, you'll get a prize...

Romans 12:1-2...

Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Ephesians 2:8-10...

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Over the coming few weeks, use the cards provided, committing these to memory.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14...*¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

Paul touches on a vital conversation in which we need to grow in knowledge & experience - **the individuals meaning to community / the community's meaning to the individual.**

But not just *any* community, rather the very unique church community. **In our context community = church.** We're not just people who share a common interest, like a bowling team, business associates, theater lovers, or social activists.

The church is unique in nature, on what it centers itself upon & in how it's governed. It's not a social club, or simply a warm community. Our statement of faith is comprehensive, definitive & some may regard as exclusionary. Exclusionary, not in a negative way, as if the church wants to drive people away from itself. On the contrary church has always been invitational to all peoples.

But exclusionary, in how God's defined the church as to what it is & isn't. We come as we are, no matter our ethnic background, or social status. We come warts & all. We don't get ourselves cleaned up before we meet Jesus. As a matter of fact, we don't even know we need cleaning up until He draws us in & reveals it to us - the invitational part! The doors are wide open for all to know Jesus & be transformed.

Before Ephesians 2:8-10, in vv1-5 it says, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions & sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world & of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh & following its desires & thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.*

We come to Christ & to church as we are, not fully realizing our need of repentance & healing. As a result of the Spirits ministry, prayer, and the washing of the Word in church community, we are made alive & transformed by Christ, becoming an interdependent part of His Body.

To come to Christ is to come into the local church. There are no lone cowboy Christians, the Christian walk will always be a crippled gate when not walked within the walls of church community. Either Cyprian, or St Augustine said...*"He cannot have God for his Father who will not have the Church for his mother."* There's something true of that statement, when we realize the Christian life can't be lived individualistically. It must be in church community, not theoretically, but in very flesh & blood proximity.

So, church community is exclusionary, in the positive sense - there are beliefs the Church derives from the Scriptures which we profess as absolute Truth in Christ's Body. All in order to guard the integrity of the Gospel, keep unity, glorify Jesus & lead people towards Him well. Freedom comes from obedience to God's loving truth.

Church is *not* a democracy, neither is it anarchistic. It has structure, leadership & clearly defined purpose, vision & mission. All that, not simply for the good of people, but for the glory of God! Christ's reign is a kingdom rule. Jesus is the head of the Church, He's our Lord, benevolent King & our ultimate goal. We exist for God's glory through God's mission, to know Christ & make Him known. We are outposts fo the kingdom.

The Church, throughout the centuries, has sought to articulate, through its Creeds, foundational beliefs to bolster understanding & guard the integrity of its message. You've heard of the Apostles, Chalcedonian & Nicene Creeds to name a few.

In reading the Nicene Creed, for example, you'll notice the foundational beliefs proclaimed concerning, The nature of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Birth, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, etc. It's comprehensive, but not exhaustive. It goes like this...

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty maker of heaven & earth, of all that is, seen & unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

For us men & for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death & was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living & the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father & the Son. With the Father & the Son he is worshipped & glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic & apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

Creeds & statements of faith are important - they define who we are & more importantly, who we're about! They seek to maintain the purity of the Gospel message from cultural encroachment & from those who'd seek to twist its meaning.

We're **Christians of a local Church Community**. The continued embodiment of Jesus to a specific local community at a specific time in history. Believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, making up the Body of Christ in a certain geographical area. Spiritual & divine on one hand, physical & proximate on the other. Physical entities occupying space & time, bumping into one another, interacting internally with other Christians & externally with Non-Christians.

It's in the local body of Christ where we learn **the powerfully humbling lesson of interdependence**. We need the church & the church need us. We're not a true member if we regard ourselves as *independent* of it. Nor do we operate as a healthy member of the church when we're in complete *dependence* upon it. Although, in very early faith, someone is often very dependent on the church. That's okay for a time, but we must settle into *interdependence* - healthy give & take in church community.

To understand this, means Sunday worship services, community groups, Kingdom Opportunities & discipleship relationships become indispensable. We wouldn't miss them. We'd be eager to find our place of service within the church. And until we do, we'd be willing to do whatever's asked of us. We'd be eager to find others to grow more deeply with, through sharing, study & prayer.

Someone said this week that if they didn't have healthy church interactions throughout the week they'd be lost! I agree, life's hard, especially now! More than ever we need to be faithfully active in each others lives. Scripture exhorts us to love, prayer & encouragement of one another often.

Whereas the world can be hard in a way which drains. Healthy church life can be hard in a way which brings freedom & glorifies Jesus. He's our goal, so we deal with whatever stands in the way of His reign in our hearts & community. Following Jesus in community with others has its benefits which sociologists have studied & found that those who attend church regularly...

1. Live 7.5 years longer than those who don't.
2. Are 56 percent more likely to have an optimistic outlook.
3. Are 27 percent less likely to be depressed.
4. Are 35 percent less likely to get divorced.
5. Have higher average levels of commitment & marital satisfaction, less thinking & talking about divorce, and lower levels of negative interaction.¹
6. Achieve higher grades, practice better time management & have a better sex life.

Studies are clear: life's typically better for those who regularly engage deeply in church community which doesn't surprise me in the least.

We're not knitting body part to body part from lifeless cadavers, like some Frankensteinian creation. We're born again, life-filled, created beings, grafted into the body of Christ. Made whole. Made alive. Made family. Forgiven. We fit here. If we feel we don't fit, remember, feelings aren't facts. Wrong thoughts need to be taken captive to Christ & crucified for the lies they are. You fit into the Body of Christ because Jesus said so, in contrast to what your insecurities, or fears, tell you.

It's important to remember, **there's no holistic spiritual formation of the individual outside of the faith community.** This goes both ways...the holistic spiritual health of the individual adds to the spiritual health of the community. And the holistic spiritual health of the community aides in the development of the holistic spiritual health of the individual.

A body shares life-blood, DNA, regenerates cell & tissue, it grows & repairs itself over a lifetime. The Christian can only become whole through interdependent interaction with

¹ Scott Stanley et al., "Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 Baseline Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce," http://www.okmarriage.org/downloads/media/survey_report.pdf.

the other members of a faith community, sharing the DNA of Jesus, allowing the Spirit to do its reparative work through the Body of Christ as we grow together.

What are the enemies of this? Pride in the forms of Self-Pity (overly dependent - the one who only takes) & Narcissism (independent). A healthy body is interdependent, knowing it needs others parts to survive & thrive, but also that it brings a unique value to body life as well - convicted in a humble service-minded way, the Body needs them.

In this series we've discussed *Being (in Christ)* leading to *Doing (Good Works)*. Part of that is **knowing who Christ created you to be, and what you bring to community**. Our personal Gifting's are God's grace given through individuals as we enrich the church through God's unique creation of our personalities. But the faith community is also God's means of grace to individuals as God nurtures us along through His Body, the local church.

We've looked at Romans 12:1-2, and vv3-6a lead us further in becoming a healthy interdependent part of Christ's Body beginning from a place of humility, as it says...³ *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.* ⁴ *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,* ⁵ *so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.* ⁶ *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.*

Thinking of yourself with sober judgement is difficult for those wallowing in self-pity, or with their head in the clouds of narcissism. Many times those people find out who they really are through the hard knocks of confrontation in community, as they should, and need to be confronted, if gentle reasoning proves fruitless.

When they do, they should remember Proverbs 3:11-12 says, ¹¹ *My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke,* ¹² *because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.* The hardest thing to do is to resist the urge to cut & run, or go dormant when our pride is confronted in community. **Discipline & acceptance are not mutually exclusive. Actually, discipline translates to real acceptance, we take time to lovingly discipline the ones for whom we care. And those who stick around to go through loving confrontation, find out people are very understanding & forgiving. So, some need to have their thoughts lifted out of the cesspool of self-concern. Others, need to be reeled in from the clouds. And still some need correction in our theological approach to life - bringing our thoughts in line with Scriptural truth.**

Romans 12 says again, we're in community, everyone with different functions, belonging to one another. Relying on one another. Does it frighten you to be relied on? Can you be relied on to use your gifts for Jesus in this community? Does it frighten you to 'belong to others'? God's graced each one of us with gifts, calling us to use them for His Glory towards His Mission through His Body, the local church.

There are great tools out there to understand yourself better & how you interact with others. The Meyers-Briggs Personality test, building on Carl Jung's 16 personality types is very helpful. The Enneagram, another useful tool in developing your understanding of how you interact in community. These, and other tools, including counseling & books, can reveal your natural tendencies as God created you, but they also reveal how other personalities types tend to upset you & why. This enables you to react differently to them. To be more calculated, instead of knee-jerk. One of the greatest mistakes is that we tend to rely too strongly on some of these tests & forgo the fact that the Spirit of God is continually changing us. He's using other personality types in community to teach us the characteristics they naturally exude, and vice-versa.

Ephesians 4 reveals to where this all leads...¹¹ *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors & teachers,* ¹² *to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* ¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith & in the knowledge of the Son of God & become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

¹⁴ *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back & forth by the waves, and blown here & there by every wind of teaching & by the cunning & craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.* ¹⁵ *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.* ¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined & held together by every supporting ligament, grows & builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

This is the end goal: a healthy, solid, knowledgeable, wise, interdependent, living, breathing, mature, loving, reliable, active, full Body of Christ influencing each other & the world for God's Glory & God's Mission.

For this to happen, remember, (1) there's no holistic spiritual formation of the individual outside of church. (2) Church life is important; quantity time = quality time. (3) Unity in belief & conviction is important. (4) Explore who Christ created you to be, what you bring to community, and engage in local church life with this unique gifting. (5) Be reliable, you belong to others - Discipleship/Service. (6) Remember, it's for God's glory through His Mission.

Use your cards provided with the verses we've chosen for this series (Rm 12:1-2 & Eph 2:8-10). If you didn't get one on the way in, there are more on the table by the door. And, as other spiritual mentors have shared in past weeks concerning practices which enable us to submit ourselves to the Spirit's transformative hand. Rob's going to share another one of those with us today...

Questions for Study

1.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

STATEMENT OF FAITH

SixEight stands firmly in the center of historic Christian teaching. We affirm the Apostles', Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds, which reflect Christian orthodoxy and the clear teaching of the Bible.

We believe that **THE BIBLE** in its entirety is God's word. The Old and New Testament Scriptures are divinely inspired, truthful, authoritative, and infallible in matters of faith and practice. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16, 2 PETER 1:20-21, 2 TIMOTHY 1:13, PSALMS 119:105, 160; 12:6, PROVERBS 30:5

We believe in **ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD**, eternally existing in three persons, equal in power and glory: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This triune God created all, upholds all, and governs all.

We believe in **THE FATHER**, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, goodness, mercy, justice, and love. We believe that he involves himself actively in human affairs, that he hears and answers prayers, and that he saves from sin and death all who come to him through Jesus Christ. GENESIS 1:1, 26-27; 3:22, PSALM 90:2, MATTHEW 28:19, 1 PETER 1:2, 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

We believe in **THE SON, JESUS CHRIST**, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born to a virgin. We believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. He is the perfect model of humanity as God intended it to be. We believe in his miracles, teachings and sinless life; his substitutionary atoning death; his bodily resurrection; and his ascension into heaven.

We believe that when Jesus first came to earth he inaugurated the fulfillment of the **KINGDOM OF GOD**. He is the living and sovereign Messiah King, advancing God's reign throughout every generation and throughout the whole earth today. MATTHEW 1:18-23, ISAIAH 9:6, JOHN 1:1-5, 14:10-30, HEBREWS 4:14-15, 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-4, ROMANS 1:3-4, ACTS 1:9-11, 1 TIMOTHY 6:14-15, TITUS 2:13 JOHN 3:16, 1 JOHN 2:25; 5:11-13, ROMANS 6:23, 1 CORINTHIANS 2:7-9, REVELATION 20:15, 2 CORINTHIANS 4:15

We believe in **THE HOLY SPIRIT**, who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower for ministry all who believe in Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit is an abiding helper, teacher, and guide, and that he indwells every believer in Jesus Christ. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of all the biblical gifts of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17, John 16:7-13; 14:16-17, Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16, Ephesians 1:13, Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 5:18

We believe that all **PEOPLE** are created in the image of God; this secures and establishes their value. Yet all people are also sinners by nature and choice, and are therefore under condemnation. We believe that God forgives, regenerates, and makes righteous those who repent of their sins and place their full faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Genesis 1:27, Psalms 8:3-6, Isaiah 53:6, Romans 3:23, Isaiah 59: 1-2, Ephesians 2:13

We believe that **SALVATION** is a gift of grace from God, received by faith and yielding new, abundant, and eternal life. Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 14:6; 1:12, Titus 3:5, Galatians 3:26, Romans 5:1; 10:9-10

We believe in **THE CHURCH** universal, the living spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all regenerated persons are members.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ committed two **ORDINANCES** to the Church for believers: baptism and communion.

We believe in the personal, visible **RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST** to earth and the consummation of his Kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the final judgment of both the living and the dead. We believe in the eternal punishment of the unrighteous, who will be separated forever from the presence of God. And we believe in the eternal blessing of the righteous, who will be united forever with the God who loves them and has redeemed them. At the end of time, God will reign in glory over a new heaven and a new earth, recreated by his mighty power, where he will be forever worshipped, enjoyed, and loved.

We believe in **ETERNAL SECURITY**. It is grace and the keeping power of God that gives this security. Salvation is affected and maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. John 10:29, 2 Timothy 1:12, Hebrews 7:25, 10:10-14, 1 Peter 1:3-5