

You Are Connected  
I Corinthians 12:14-26  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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I have a friend who is a dentist. He was the one who taught me that dentists sometimes identify other health crises that aren't directly tooth related. I hadn't ever really thought about that before. When I went to the dentist, I expected them to talk to me about my teeth - about things like cavities, tartar build up, or the need for braces. It also made sense to me that they would talk about gum health and that they could identify oral cancers. But it had not occurred to me that my dentist might notice signs of osteoporosis, sleep apnea, diabetes, heart disease, or kidney disease. After all, those aren't dental problems.

My husband, Jim, had a similar, surprising interaction with a doctor. In his case it was a chiropractor. It was his first visit and after his initial examination the doctor asked him if he would like to get rid of his heartburn. Jim was confused for a minute; heartburn wasn't what had taken him to the chiropractor. Then he was sure that I had mentioned his heartburn to her. I had not. Rather, because the nerves all connect with the spine, she was able to tell that something was amiss in the area that connects to the stomach which often produces symptoms such as heartburn. It wasn't long before his symptoms went away.

While we often think of one body part or body system at a time, these and other experiences like them are reminders that all of our systems are connected - our body, while made up of various parts, really is one body.

And that isn't only true within our physical bodies.

As we continue to read from I Corinthians today, we hear that Paul used this metaphor of the body to talk to the people in Corinth about the church. Just after having pointed to the varieties of gifts, Paul then weaves those gifts, and the people who have them, together in the image of the body.

And this is no small deal. Not only is it important because of what Paul says, but also because of the reality around him. As seminary professor Brian Peterson reminds us, "Other writers in the Roman world (especially politicians and philosophers) used the same image. Most often, [the image of the body] was used to support the social hierarchy (whether of the family, or the city, or the empire as a whole). The point was that every body needs a head, and in society that was provided by the wealthy, the rulers, and the elite. Every body needs hands and feet to do the hard and dirty work, and that was provided in society by just about everyone else. Paul, while drawing on the same image, turns the point in a very different direction" ([Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

So, the people who were reading this letter from Paul, they would have been used to the image of the body. And they would have been ready to hear it used to put them in their place.

But Paul had a different message.

His was a message of value - the value of all parts of the body, and therefore all people in the church. His was a message that went beyond a cursory nod and pushed this idea well beyond what the people would have expected. Contrary to the messages they heard in the culture around them, Paul did not spend time telling them why the rich and powerful were rich and powerful and how the rest of them should work hard to keep it that way. Rather, Paul told them that every single one of them mattered and that the ones who, on first glance, seemed to matter least were really so very important.

And while we need this reminder, too, the reality is that we know this in so many ways. We see it simply in worship. Sometimes it is the young child who carefully lights the candle or the new or less confident reader who musters up the courage to read scripture in worship, sometimes it is these moments that make a much greater impression on us than the sermon ever will.

And so we hear Paul's words and we are less surprised by them than their original hearers would have been. At least on an intellectual level we know the truth of what he writes to the church at Corinth. We know that everyone is gifted in their own special way. And we know that everyone is important, that the church and our community are really not whole without everyone's participation and without everyone knowing they are valued.

Even when, in practice, it can sometimes be hard to appreciate the gifts and presence of each and every person, still we as a congregation have claimed the value of diversity and the importance of everyone.

We put words on this value several years ago when we wrote our welcome statement. You might remember that statement. It reads, "At First Christian Church of Iowa City/Coralville, we aspire to share God's expansive and unconditional love with all, with respect and positive regard for our human differences. Whatever your lived experience, skin color, native tongue or dialect, ethnicity or nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, relationship or family status, age, size, physical or mental health, economic situation, addiction, ability or disability, education level, profession, faith history, and politics ... there is room for you at the table. It is God's welcome and is without limitations."

We have claimed the importance of the whole body of the church. We have claimed our commitment to this, even when it means wrestling through difficult conversations.

But that's not all. There is one more thing we don't want to miss in Paul's writing. Not only does he name the importance of various gifts. Not only does he talk about how

every part of the body, or every person in the church, matters. But he also reminds us that we are all connected.

Just like inflammation in our gums could be connected to heart disease and a chiropractic adjustment can address heartburn, Paul reminds us that we are all connected to and we all have an impact on each other.

Our reading today ended this way: *If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it* (I Corinthians 12:26, NRSVUE).

In other words, we aren't only in the church together so that our gifts complement each other. We aren't only here together so that the church has all the skills and gifts it needs. We aren't only here together to learn how to love people who are different from us.

But we are here to support one another, to celebrate with one another, to mourn with one another.

We are here together because connection matters, because we are not made to do this thing called life alone. Rather, connected to each other, in a system larger and more gifted than any one of us alone, we are invited to journey together through life and together to live from God's heart.

We are invited to remember that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And that reality means that we are never alone. Rather we are called to be present with and for each other, to live as if we are all connected, to remember that our lives impact each other and that we are better together.

Friends, you are gifted. You are valued. And you are connected. Amen.