

“Different Tools for Different Tasks”

Text: 1 Corinthians 12: 12 -31a; Luke 4: 14 -21

Used: Cong. Church of Naugatuck – 1/24/09

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts, be acceptable unto Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The human body is an incredibly complex system. I am sure those of you in the medical field already know this. But those of us who don't regularly dabble in the medical sciences may tend to forget. As a reminder, it seems the human body is comprised of around 60 million cells. Our bodies have about 60,000 miles of blood vessels in it. They produce 300 billion new red blood cells every day. And to make it all work our hearts beat 36 million times a year. Incredibly complex!

I've spent a good bit of time last week, and will again next week, being reminded just how complex the body is. You see I've been taking a health education course for diabetics. Yes, about eight weeks ago I was diagnosed as a Type-2 diabetic. Now, when my general practitioner's office first informed me of this news they made the whole thing sound quite simply. "Just stay away from anything white," they said. "No white bread, no white rice, no pasta, no potatoes; nothing made out of all-purpose flour and nothing made with processed sugar." While the whole thing was a big shock, the instructions were at least simple enough that I felt I could follow them. I should have known it wouldn't last.

My classes this past week provided me with the realization that there is nothing simple about this. Tuesday's class was on foods. The good news was that I learned I should actually be taking in more carbohydrates than I thought I should. But then I learned that there are three different groups of carbs – milk, fruit and starch – and you need to keep them in a balance. Okay I can handle that. Then there are fats. And there are I don't know how many different types of those – some bad for you and some that help. They, along with proteins, are important for me because they slow the digestion process allowing my body to better process the glucose...but some should be avoided altogether and the rest in moderation due to

potential cardiac concern. Oh. And then there is salt – which also has some important nutritional value particular iodine – but the sodium can be very taxing on the kidneys. So don't avoid it but keep it less than 480 mg per meal. Wow. Then we moved on to this list of about 40 foods each of which had benefits but also consequences. For example, potatoes: no more than half a cup at any meal but you need to have them because of their potassium content. By the time I got home, I said to Paige, "the class made eating seem so complicated it makes you want to give up on it all together." Can you believe me saying that? Don't worry that's not my plan. But I do have to say the whole learning process has been quite informative but also overwhelming and even a bit scary.

So with all this as background, imagine how I felt this week while reflecting on Paul's metaphor of the Christian community being like a body. I kept saying over and over again in my head, "Paul you make it sound way too simple"

Now I wouldn't argue with Paul's premise at all. The body is made up of many components. Each one is unique and serves a valuable function. No one is more important or greater than the other. As a matter of fact, in many cases one can not function without the other.

Further I would agree with Paul's assertion that the Christian community is much like this. We are all uniquely gifted and each serve valuable functions. While some may be more visible, no one is greater or more important than the other. In fact, we can not be Christian community without each other.

If we stop and ponder I suspect we can all think of a person or two who are like the hands of the church – always doing the hands on work to get things done. And we can probably think of a person or two who are like the feet carrying much of the load for the rest of us. There are a few who provide us the vision for where we are going like the eyes. And there are some who are the ears, the best listeners in our community. Yes, the metaphor of a body does work very well for who we are as a Christian community.

No, my issue with Paul isn't his choice of metaphor but that he doesn't take it far enough. Paul only speaks about the visible out front parts of the body, but as I have learned this past week there are a lot of parts of the body doing imperative things behind the scenes.

Think about it. Who is the heart – pumping lifeblood throughout our community? Who are the nerves – feeling the ways in which the

outside world impact our community? Who are taste buds – letting us know when we’ve encountered the sweetness of life - but also telling us what is sour? Who are the kidneys – helping our community to eliminate toxins? Who is the thyroid – pacing our community to do consistent work for God?

Being a Christian community is so much more complex than we often consider it to be. Just doing the surface functions – a weekly service, a balanced budget and a few pot lucks – isn’t being a healthy Christian community. We need to make sure everyone is being valued and is working to their potential to be the community God is calling us to be.

An example, often when we are talking right now about our budget deficit we say the obvious solution is to get more members. That is correct, but it is a simple answer to a complex question. It is the equivalent of saying the solution to being hungry is to eat more food. It is absolutely correct, but also denies the reality that there may be unhealthy consequences to eating a lot more food. In order to keep who we are as a community healthy we need to look at who we are not in simple ways but in its full complexity.

If you will permit me to switch metaphors for a moment, one that I find is particularly helpful for us as a Christian community is this...a tool box. We as a community are God’s toolbox tasked with building the Kingdom of God. God has graced us with a whole variety of different tools in our toolbox. All are unique...and some are quite unique.

The challenge many Christian communities have is that we try to attack our building projects with just one or two tools...and often they are the same one or two tools. We do it that way “because it’s the way it has always been”. Or perhaps because “it’s always the same ones who step forward”. Such statements, and we’ve all made them, are excuses for simplicity.

The problem is you can’t build with just a hammer and a screwdriver. They’ll do a lot for you and they are incredibly valuable, but there are simply things they can not do. A hammer and screwdriver won’t tell you if something is plum or level. A hammer or screwdriver won’t measure the length at which something needs to be cut...nor can they cut it. And sometimes a hammer needs a drill to pre-drill a hole to keep its nail from splitting the wood. I want to be clear that I’m not just intending to associate different people with being different tools. This also works for different

strategies, different solutions, different approaches to being a church. The same ones do not work in every situation. Unfortunately, churches do become unhealthy by trying to apply a particular approach or two to every situation. What we are building is far more complex than that.

In building the Kingdom of God, just like in life, there are different tools for different tasks.

We need to make sure we are digging deep into our toolbox to find the right one. Sometime this may even mean we have to be patient in building because we don't have the right tool yet.

Let me share with you a wonderful little story about someone who truly understood what it means to build up God's kingdom.

A man was admiring a beautiful cathedral, when he happened to notice a little girl sitting on the front steps watching him.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"It's a beautiful church," he answered. "It's clear that it was built with care and love."

"I'm glad you like it," she said, "because I helped build it."

"You did? You're awfully small to have worked on such a big building. Tell me, what did you do?"

"Well," said the little girl, "My father is a bricklayer, and he worked on this church. Every day when he was at work, I brought him his lunch."

"Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ". We are the body of Christ. But as I said earlier, the body is an incredibly complex system. May we be those who care enough to keep it healthy in all its complexity. Amen.