

Sermon, Leith Valley, May 28, 2017
The Body of Christ on Mondays

Paul Trebilco

Readings: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Matthew 5:13-16

Our reading from 1 Cor 12 is about the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. The basic idea is that there are many parts to a body, but it is still one body. Arms and legs, and eyes and ears. The stomach and the heart and muscles. A body is made up of a whole variety of different parts. Yet it is one body.

Notice how this comes about – v13: For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Our unity – that we are one body – is the work of the Spirit! The Holy Spirit, given to us all, connects us, and makes us one. This is an amazing gift. It is *not* that we all believe the same, or think the same and that's what makes us one! We are not all the same!! What makes us one is our common experience of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who makes us children of God, who transforms us and makes us one body of Christ. We are all baptised into one body – we *become* one body. Varied and different as we are, we are still one!

But notice how we're all different and every part needs every other part. That's central to the whole idea. If we were all arms, we wouldn't be a body – we'd be a whole lot of arms. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be, Paul says? And if we decided that only the visible parts were important – and so wanted to do away with the stomach – then those visible parts would eventually die!

The analogy of a body for an organisation or group was known in antiquity outside of the biblical world. Note this story from the Roman Historian Livy (History of Rome 2:32):

In the days when man's members did not all agree amongst themselves, as is now the case, but had each its own ideas and a voice of its own, the other parts thought it unfair that they should have the worry and the trouble and the labour of providing everything for the belly, while the belly remained quietly in their midst with nothing to do but to enjoy the good things which they bestowed upon it; they therefore conspired together that the hands should carry no food to the mouth, nor the mouth accept anything that was given it, nor the teeth grind up what they received. While they sought in this angry spirit to starve the belly into submission, the members themselves and the whole body were reduced to the utmost weakness. Hence it had become clear that even the belly had no idle task to perform, and was no more nourished than it nourished the rest, by giving

out to all parts of the body that by which we live and thrive, when it has been divided equally amongst the veins and is enriched with digested food —that is, the blood.

So readers would have been familiar with the idea of a body with many parts – and where every part – every person – was important. All parts are valued; many members, but one body. And all sorts of variety – and certainly not uniformity.

So what does this mean? We all have gifts, we all have a place, we all have a role. Body ministry. We're all vitally important – and no one person is more important than any other.

But let's ask a slightly different question. What happens to 'the body of Christ' on Mondays and Tuesdays and the rest of the week? We're clearly here, gathered, as Christ's body today, but tomorrow, we're all over the place – some of us will even be out of town. Are we still the body of Christ? Does this body of Christ still exist?

Well – yes! We still belong to each other. We're still 'part of Christ'. We're just 'dispersed', scattered all over the place. But we still belong to Christ, we still belong to each other, we still have our gifts and our roles. Its just that we're using those gifts – out there. We're being the hands and feet and muscles of the body of Christ – in the world.

So here is a real challenge for the church I think. It is very easy for us to become preoccupied with ourselves, as a church. We think about how we do things, and what we do. We become concerned about budgets and having enough money – and that's important. We write mission statements and plans – and they're important too. We greatly enjoy our worship together – very important.

But we're still members of Christ's body on Mondays – wherever you spend your Mondays. It might be at home, or looking after children, or sharing time with others, or doing voluntary work, or in paid work doing all of the many things people in this community do.

Whatever it is – we're still members of Christ's body on Mondays. We're still doing Christ's work on Mondays. Whatever we do on Mondays is as important for God as what we do here! But its so easy for us to think about the Christian life in terms of Sundays, and in terms of all we do in Church. Don't get me wrong – church is really important. But so is all our 'out-of –Church time'.

For me this is a matter of perspective. I was expecting rain yesterday – it was forecast, but didn't really come. So I changed what I wanted to do – my expectations, my mind set. Do we have the mind set that what really matters is Church on Sundays, and Church

work? That other work is second best? No – all our callings are part of the body of Christ, whether in Church or out. Wherever we are its vital, it is for God.

The church is one of those few organisations that does not exist for itself, or for its own benefit. We exist for people who don't belong, for non-members.

Think of a sports club. It exists to play that sport. So a rugby game is focussed on playing the game on a Saturday afternoon, or whenever. The practices, the training, are aimed at culminating in the game. The fund-raising, club rooms etc. – are for the game. A golf club exists for its members.

The church is not like that. Everything is not focussed on Sunday – on what we do when we get together. Of course, coming together is really important. But just as important, perhaps more so, is the rest of life. Of what we do on Mondays. The dispersed ministries that we all undertake when we're the body of Christ on Mondays.

Perhaps we are like one sport – surf life saving. What they do is for others – not for themselves. But even there, they do so in a particular place and together.

And so we are the church, the body of Christ, still on Mondays. All that we each do, during the week is as Christ's body.

So who is the most important person around here? Its entirely the wrong question to ask. We're all important! Of course, those that work in the church are very important. But all of us are just as important, are just as much living for Christ – wherever we are, whatever we are doing. The body has many parts and all are important – not just for what they do but for who they are! We should never regard one person as more important than another.

Let's turn to our reading from Matthew 5:13-16.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

Salt had a multitude of uses in the ancient world – as a purifying agent, as seasoning added to food, as a preservative, as a fertiliser, as a key ingredient the body needs, as something that is associated with wisdom. It was very useful.

You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hidden – Jesus is thinking of Jerusalem. Seen from all around.

Lighting a lamp – you put it on a stand, not under a cover, so it can light up the whole room.

So the point is that both salt and light are useful – and associated with doing good things.

Jesus says, *You* are the salt of the earth. *You* are the light of the world.

'In speaking of 'You' here, Jesus is addressing his disciples. These are people who are blessed in the Beatitudes – as those to whom the Kingdom of Heaven is given, as those who receive mercy and are called children of God. *We* are to be salt and light. But perhaps the crucial question is – Where?

Salt does little good if it stays in the Salt shaker. It works by being sprinkled! 'Salt is only salt when it salts'!. As Luther wrote 'salt is not salt for itself, it cannot salt itself'. So disciples are to be useful for the world. And note the universal vision here: salt of the earth, light of the world! Not just of a little patch – but of the world!!

Light illuminates what is around it. Our purpose is to bring God's light to the world around. So we must be in the world for the world. To hide away would be a betrayal of God's purposes for us.

And 5:16: ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

'Jesus' disciples are to live in the world so that the world will see them and be moved to glorify God. Closet Christianity and self-directed service are excluded'. (Allison) It is about bearing witness with one's life – which is the calling for all of us.

And people seeing what we do and who we are, is not an end in itself – it is that people might 'glorify God'.

So here we have the same idea about what we should do on Mondays. Its about being salt of the earth and light of the world. Not about being salt in the salt-shaker and light in the church.

Its about being useful for the world – about letting our light shine out there! Its not about us simply being together on a Sunday. That is important. Jesus says in v13: 'if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.' In part, we retain our saltiness, our taste, by being together – and by what God does with us together.

But the rest of the story is being out of the salt shaker and out there in the world.

I don't think there's anything that anyone here does that could not be regarded as being part of the salt and light of the body of Christ. Anything we do with other people or in God's creation is part of this. No activity can be regarded as insignificant. I'm not talking about always speaking about Christ. I'm talking about living the life of the body of Christ day by day out there.

Now this is a very 'out there' church. Lots of people do lots of amazing things. But perhaps sometimes we don't see ourselves as members of Christ's body, living out there in the world.

I think it's so easy to lose our perspective on this one and for church to become focussed on itself. We can become preoccupied with ourselves. But we exist for the world. We need to encourage one another in what we do every day.

Finally, what difference does it make to think of ourselves as part of the dispersed body of Christ on Mondays?

- We're to support one another in the rest of our lives – whatever we do. Our interviews in which we hear from people of what they do on Mondays – and how they are part of the body of Christ on Mondays have been great. We need more of it!
- We are all equal – no work, no activity, no person, is more important than any other.
- Christian Character is perhaps what counts. Being like Christ – its not about what we do, its about who we are. Students sat its not what we've taught them that they remember, its who we are! Scary!
- The undivided life – we're not one person on a Sunday and someone else the rest of the week. Christ is Lord of all our lives – everywhere.
- This all calls for Deep Thought – what does it mean to raise children as a member of the body of Christ – to raise children Christianly? What does it mean to be a Christian teacher or lawyer or accountant or grandmother or ...? These are challenging questions- that we should talk about as the body of Christ, dispersed during the week.

So may we be the body of Christ on Mondays as well as on Sundays. And may our light so shine before others that they may see our lives and give glory to our Father in Heaven.

Amen.