

“Walking and Chewing Gum”
Romans 12:1-8
August 23, 2020
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Was there ever a time when you felt in really great shape?

By that I mean - - healthy and physically fit and ready to take on anything?

Maybe it was a while ago...?

Maybe you think I should feel great after my months of sabbatical and rest. / And that is certainly part of it. / But it was also a strange time in our world - - with the events of the Covid virus - - and the protests in response to the death of George Floyd. / So while I AM glad to be back in connection with all of you - - it seems like a LOT has happened since March!

And for me - - I cancelled all of my plans - - and made new plans.

And so I am in shape - - sort of.

I tried to get in shape better spiritually - - while staying in shape physically.

I tried to avoid putting on the so called - - “pandemic pounds”.

Whatever you answer can you at least agree that there’s nothing quite like - - feeling healthy and strong?

If anything has become clear to me in the past 6 months it is that our bodies are fragile and vulnerable. / There’s nothing like a virus that brings the world to a standstill to get our attention. / And even pro athletes - - whose bodies are in great shape - - can get a virus and cause Major League Baseball to have to cancel games.

One thing I have experienced in the last few months is a kind of isolation.

And yet - - a longing - - to be part of something more than just myself.

And my feelings about my body and my soul - - are kind of similar.

In fact - - in the Bible reading for this morning - - Paul tells us how we CAN - - each one of us - - PARTICIPATE in something GREATER than ourselves - - -

- - - and how we can be the very BEST that we can be.

In chapter 12 of Romans, Paul compares our life together as Christians - - to a BODY. / Paul says that the CHURCH is like a BODY. / / / And this is NO ordinary body. / / / It is a body that can: TEACH, and EXHORT, and PROPHECY, and SERVE others, and GIVE, and be MERCIFUL, and be PEACEABLE, and PATIENT - even during TROUBLE, and constant in PRAYER, and GOOD and HARMONIOUS

. . . ALL of that. from only ONE body !

I remember an advertisement in a magazine - - years ago - - with a picture of NOLAN RYAN - - which said: "With his BODY - - Lynn Nolan Ryan Jr., 46, has pitched 5,334 innings, struck out 5,678 batters, thrown 7 no-hitters, while running a ranch, and overseeing two banks.

What are you doing with YOUR body??

It's a challenging ad.

And it is a challenging chapter from Romans. It goes on after verse 8, to charge us to, "hate evil, and hold fast to good, outdo one another in showing honor, never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit - - - - and on - - and on.

But, if you become overwhelmed - - remember what Paul is describing - - not some impossible ideal for an ISOLATED individual - - - NO - - - Paul is describing life in COMMUNITY - - - life in the CHURCH - - - we are one body TOGETHER.

We are one body - - IN COOPERATION.

That is the only way it works.

Imagine if all the different parts of your body - - DISAGREED about where to go for the afternoon! / Or if your HAND - - didn't like what your brain and mouth had chosen - - for lunch and threw it on the floor!

It might get to be a bit like the Lori Anderson song in which she has a conversation with her dissatisfied BRAIN - - when she comes home from work her brain entices her out to the park - - or begs her to get a REAL job - - or to go to TAHITI.

That is NOT how a body works.

The body isn't just a vehicle for the brain to drive around in!

We DWELL in these precious bodies - - and they send us messages - - if we listen.

AND - - says Paul - - COMMUNITY works the same way. / In fact - - the answer to the question of - - how we can be the very BEST we can be - - how we can be good and perfect and holy ??? The answer Paul suggests is that we can be our very best ONLY when we are NOT ISOLATED and off by ourselves - - ignoring those around us.

The whole issue of masks - - and whether or not to wear them is an example. / We wear masks for ourselves AND for OTHERS. / We sink or swim as a community - - based on whether or not we engage in agreed upon communal behaviors. / The whole idea that in this country people we elect - - GOVERN BY - - the CONSENT of the governed - - is important.

There are dangers - - to becoming isolated in one's own little world - - and not caring about the people around us.

There are dangers - - if we refuse to rely on the gifts of others that are greater than ours - - if we block out the warnings around us - - if we block out the HELP around us - - if we don't listen to doctors and scientists - - if we decide not to listen to the voices of those long suppressed by racism in this country.

Strength - - comes from dependence - - NOT from independence.

It is - - the STRENGTH that we can have - - when we work together - as ONE body.

And we DO have a lot of help, and strength, and experience around us in this church. / It may just be a matter of CONNECTING with that other part of the body which can lift you up.

Ask yourself this:

Do you SEEK other people out - - when you are struggling?

Do you reach out - - to nurture others?

Do you have a partner in prayer?

There are all kinds of ways we can work together as the body of Christ.

Our mission projects are another example.

None of us are the same. . .

. . . but when we work together as one body - - in cooperation rather than isolation - - we can do so much. / And we DON'T have to be - - together PHYSICALLY to do it!

When we DON'T - - - even something as SIMPLE as walking and chewing gum - - - might become difficult. / For most of us, walking and chewing gum at the same time - - is not a problem. / But in order for it to work - - we have to let the feet do the walking, and the teeth to the chewing. / And as simple as it sounds, it is NOT something I always remember.

What I mean is this:

We each play a different part in the life of the church - - and in our communities - - in our families - - groups of friends - - and in our nation and world. / We each have a GIFT. / And we are NOT the same. Many DIFFERENT things CAN happen at once - - as long as people cooperate. / As long as we allow everyone the room to use their gift - - and remember that our gift is probably a bit different.

Paul says it this way, ". . . I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but each according to the measure which God has assigned."

I think, Paul means here, that no ONE person is the WHOLE body.

Years go - - back when people still went camping in the summer - - at camp, I was teamed up in frisbee golf with two very good players. / We played a game in which everyone on a team took their shot, and then the BEST shot of anyone on the team, was used for the next shot. // Because of their skill, my shot was rarely the best one. // HOWEVER - - they found a place for me on the team...

When we approached a hole from kind of a LONG distance - - one of them would turn to me and say - - you just get us in close, and then we'll go for the glamorous shot. / My job was to get us a measure of safety, like insurance, get the frisbee sort of close to the goal - - so they could try the glamorous shot without worrying - - and maybe they would make it.

Then if they did NOT make it they could use my position as a fallback gimmie shot.

The difficult and glamorous shot, without a measure of safety, would have been a risk.

And the safe shot - - - if it was taken all the time - - - would rarely win a game.

It's not always so easy, however, to see how everyone's different gift and contribution can fit into the whole picture. // Sometimes we can feel left out with little to do - - - or overburdened with too MUCH of the work - - - confused about how all the different things people do FITS together.

We are - - after all - - very DIFFERENT from each other.

As different as a knee from a nose - - - or a hand from a heart - - -

How can we hold it all together ???

Our reading from Romans reminds us - - that we are NOT ONLY - - - ONE body - - - - - we are one body - - - IN CHRIST. / For a community to work as a BODY - - - we have to stay focused on Christ our center. / We are ONE - - IN CHRIST.

As I thought about staying centered, I remembered a time - - several summers ago, when I fell asleep in a boat, which was anchored in a bay. / Before I fell asleep I was looking off in the distance - studying the shoreline. / I noticed the trees - - the houses - - the shapes of the rocks and the hills. / Then I drifted off to sleep. / I WOKE with a START - realizing that I was now looking at a COMPLETELY DIFFERENT shoreline - - different trees and different houses. / Had I drifted out to sea?

Where was I!?!?

Finally, I looked over my shoulder and I realized that I had just ROTATED a bit - - around the anchor. / I WAS still anchored in the SAME SPOT - - I had only shifted positions. / The boat had shifted position - - had spun on its axis a bit. / I was simply looking at a different bit of the SAME shoreline.

Sometimes a change of perspective can be good. / The viewpoint of another person. / Someone with more - or a different life experience. / That is what the body of Christ is for.

As long as we remain ANCHORED to our center in Christ. . . the one body . . . will not only allow us to be OUR best - - - the BODY of the church - - - will be GREATER than any of us alone - - - GREATER than even the BEST one of us.

In order for it to WORK, however, we have to remember that the BODY of ALL of us IN CHRIST - - - IS greater than any one of us.

And we have to remember that ALL THE TIME.

The BODY - - - of the church - - - in Christ - - - is ALL about forgiveness - - - - and COMPASSION. / It is the very BEDROCK of what we believe: We are forgiven!

And all God expects - - is that we try to be compassionate in return.

Remember that famous Dr. Sussess story - - about the "Cat in the Hat" ? Sally and her brother sit by the window - - watching the rain - - their MOTHER is GONE for the day. / It's too wet to play - - and all they can do is just - sit,sit,sit,sit - - (kind of like this summer!) when suddenly in walks the Cat in the Hat. / And a balancing act - and thing one and thing two - - flying kites around the house - - it all creates quite a MESS.

The brother and sister try very hard to convince the cat to calm down - - and work to clean the mess up. / They finish cleaning up JUST before their mother gets home.

They take responsibility - - - even when their mother ISN'T there.

And then - - they present themselves as acceptable - - when she returns.

But it's DIFFICULT - - to act responsibly - - when we're on our OWN. / All alone.

How would you act - - if you KNEW no one would see.

How DO you act - - - when accountability is lowered ??

It may be difficult to stay on course - - - but anyone who has gone off course will tell you - - it's more difficult to get BACK on - - and the damage it can cause us - - when we become DISCONNECTED to our center in Christ - - is high.

The COMMUNITY - - the congregation - - the BODY of Christ - - it is GREATER than any ONE of US alone. / Together we can help each other reach our best.

Together - - in Christ - - we will present ourselves - - - - acceptable to our God.

May it be so... Amen.