

EVERYONE IS INVOLVED

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31 [MW19-24]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 10 November 2019

Why are we not all falling about on the floor laughing???

- we have just heard Paul speaking on an important topic a topic so important, that we pay such close attention to that maybe we miss just how it is done
- a few years ago on a course I was doing I was introduced to the “humour” of Paul that's right ... the *humour* of Paul

In my experience this passage from First Corinthians chapter twelve

- has always been presented in a very serious light Paul is explaining something very important about the Good News Jesus brings that we all have gifts and a part to play
- that we are all necessary and designed to be useful and included and if just one of us is not there, it is incomplete
- very serious important truths

So just how does Paul – staid, stuffy, formal lecturer that he is

- get across this serious and sober message?
how? by having parts of the body speak to one another!
- a foot talking to a hand
an eye talking to an ear
a whole body as a nose!
- imagine a big nose with stubby little arms and legs blundering around because it cannot see or hear

Doesn't that strike you as being just a bit funny?!?

- Paul is making a point and using this humorous picture to highlight it

There is that well known saying:

- “birds of a feather flock together” Paul's picture is in sharp contrast to this
- birds of a feather flocking together is not a picture of the church it is not the way God planned it
- Paul emphasises *different* parts working *together* very different parts doing very different things yet all in relationship

As I read and thought about Paul's words, this really came home to me

- all are part ... ALL this includes all people
- a body bigger than just our church
a body bigger than the churches of our nation
a body bigger than all the people of our nation

The body Paul writes about includes everyone: EVERYONE

- people that maybe you and I would not even dream of including people that perhaps nobody thinks could possibly be included

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:21

- one part of the body cannot say to another part of the body: “*I have no need of you*”

Paul also speaks in the same vein as Jesus

- turning our logical, common sense, practical way of thinking upside down
“*the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable*”

Paul gives us a glimpse of God's glorious vision for creation

- with a picture of a body
a living, working organism where all the different parts work together
making a truly amazing whole

“*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it*” - Paul reminds us

- so continuing Paul's humorous tradition
I am going to share with you something I came across called
“The Rebellion of the Pancreas”

[from *Hope Our Daughter* by Anne de Roo, p.18]

The Pancreas was proud to be a member of the Body, working away in the warm darkness deep inside, until one day it overheard a conversation among the Body's more visible members.

“The Body walked ten kilometres on us today,” boasted the Feet. “We've got a blister each, but that's a small price to pay for knowing that we were of service to the Body.”

I never get blisters, thought the Pancreas. *Perhaps I don't work hard enough for the Body*. And it felt ashamed that it had never offered to carry the Body anywhere.

“The Body saw a sunset through us and was filled with joy,” said the Eyes.

I didn't feel that joy, thought the Pancreas. *Was it wrong of me not to rejoice when the Body was rejoicing?* And it felt ashamed that it had not shared the Body's joy. It did not even know what a sunset was.

“The Body heard beautiful music through us,” said the Ears.

“The Body delighted in good food and drink through us,” clamoured the myriad tiny voices of the Taste Buds.

“The Body smelled a newly opened rose through me,” said the Nose, looking haughtily down itself.

“We picked the rose and put it in a vase so that the Eyes and Nose could delight the Body with it all day,” said the Hands.

I never delight the Body with anything, thought the Pancreas.

“You have all done well,” it heard the mighty Brain proclaim. “You have faithfully carried out my instructions and faithfully reported back your sensations. Today I have with your help stored many delightful sensations in my memory cells.”

But I didn't give the Body any delightful sensations to remember, thought the Pancreas. And it was sad because all it desired was to serve the Body.

The Body knelt beside its bed as it did each evening. “Thank you, Lord,” the Mouth enabled it to say under the direction of the Brain, “for all the lovely sights my Eyes have seen today, for the music and good conversation my Ears have heard, for the words of comfort my Mouth has spoken, for the strong Limbs which have enabled me to walk and to work, the Brain which has been able to learn new things.”

Every night the Body gave thanks for the member which had served it during the day, but it never gave thanks for the Pancreas.

The Body lay down. The Eyes closed, the Limbs relaxed, The Heart pumped, the Lungs breathed and the Pancreas went on secreting enzymes as it had night and day since the Body was born. *But nobody would notice if I stopped work right here and now*, it thought. And it shed little pancreatic tears.

“I'm going to stop work now,” it sobbed.

“You can't do that,” said the Brain. “All members of the Body must work for the Body.”

“But I'm no use,” sobbed the Pancreas. “The Body doesn't even know I'm here.”

“I'll just check that out,” said the Brain. “What do you call yourself?”

The Pancreas sobbed its name. There was a long silence.

“Nothing here,” the Brain reported. “Are you sure you are part of the Body and not some foreign organism that I should be marshalling the Body’s defence mechanisms against?”

“I don’t think so, mighty Brain,” said the Pancreas. “I’ve been part of the Body all my life.”

There was another long silence before the Brain said, “Wait on, little organ. There’s a faint imprint on some memory cells here. It’s filed under — let’s see — it seems to be Fourth Form Biology. Yes, pancreas or pancrus — the spelling’s got a little dim with time.”

“Does it say I’m useful?” asked the Pancreas.

The Brain studied its memory cells. “There’s nothing here but a faint trace of a name. I don’t think you can be very useful or the spelling would be clearer. I’ve always prided myself on the ability of my memory cells to retain the spelling of any important word. How do you spell your name?”

“Please, I don’t spell anything,” said the Pancreas, and began to wonder if it was of any use to the body at all ...

... The Pancreas had stopped secreting enzymes while it was thinking. It wondered whether it should begin again. But if I was any use to the Body the Brain would know about me, it thought. So it lay in the warm darkness inside the Body and did nothing. It was the first holiday it had ever had, but it would rather have been serving the Body.

The Body woke next morning feeling tired and vaguely unwell. It checked all those members it was aware of. They all seemed to be working normally, if a little less willingly than usual. The Brain sent messages screaming down the nerves: “Come on, you lot, put your backs into it. The Body has work to do. Keep a lookout for any viruses and mount defences against them. The Body doesn’t want to be weakened by any nasty little outsiders.”

No reports came back to the Brain of viruses, only of tired and weak members which as the day went on found it increasingly difficult to work as hard as the Brain ordered them to.

All week the Brain ordered the other members to try harder, but it said nothing to the Pancreas: it had forgotten again that the Pancreas existed. By now the whole Body felt so unwell that the Brain signalled, “Better get us to the doctor.”

“I’m having you admitted to the hospital for observation,” the doctor told the Body. “It would appear that your pancreas isn’t functioning and we need to know why.”

What a fool of a doctor, thought the Pancreas as it heard the other members of the Body groaning and complaining. *Here are all these fine servants of the Body growing weaker day by day and all she can discover is that I’m not functioning. Of course I’m not functioning: I have no useful function to perform.*

The specialists at the hospital took x-ray portraits of the Pancreas, they sent medicines down to it which it spat out angrily. The other members were not pleased with the attention the Pancreas was getting.

“Putting itself forward, a little internal organ so unimportant that the Brain can’t even spell its name,” said the Nose.

“Completely selfish, demanding all the attention while we’re the ones that suffer,” said the Eyes ...

The most specialised of the specialists sat down beside the Body’s bed. “We’re sending you home today,” he said. “We’ve done all the tests we can and I have to admit that we’re completely baffled. Your pancreas is a normal, healthy organ in every way but it just isn’t functioning and we can’t find the reason why. There’s really nothing we can do,” said the most specialised of specialists. “Unless, of course, it begins to function again as suddenly as it stopped.”

“Please Pancreas, function,” begged the other members.

“You must be so important,” said a Hand. “If I were chopped off the Body could function without me.”

“If we were blinded the Body would live less fully but it would live,” said the Eyes.

“The Body could still breathe if one of us collapsed,” said the Lungs. “But you’re the only Pancreas we’ve got and we need you.”

“I must be important,” said the Pancreas. “I must be as important as the Brain itself.”

“No, you are not,” snarled the Brain. Its thought cells ticked over weakly and wearily. “The way I see it, little organ,” it pronounced, “is that each of the members has its own function to perform. Some of us do mighty works for the Body, as the Heart and I do, because we were designed to do them. And yet we can’t continue to work at all unless you, our little friend, are working away down there in the darkness and in such obscurity that even I with all my wisdom had only a dim trace of you in my memory cells. The Hands and Lungs say the Body would function with only one of them and this is true; the Eyes say the Body would function if they were blinded, and this is also true. But its work would be sorely limited without any one of its members. So now, little organ, for the sake of all of us who make up the Body together, be a good little Pancreas and secrete you enzymes.”

“Please save us,” pleaded all the other members.

“It’s all right. Calm down,” the Pancreas shouted exultantly above their noise. “I’m already secreting enzymes like mad.”

The Body’s sudden recovery mystified even the most specialised of specialists. But the Pancreas knew. It heard the recovering members begin to boast of their own strength and skill. They were already forgetting the little organ on whom their lives had depended. *But I know what I know, thought the Pancreas. They are important and many do more important and visible work for the Body than mine. But they can’t do that work unless I do mine any more than I could function without them. We are the Body.*

On its first night home the Body knelt beside its bed and prayed, “Thank you, Lord, for my healthy and hard working Pancreas.” And the Pancreas knew from the way the Mouth pronounced the word that the Brain had got the spelling clearly imprinted on its memory cells now and forever more.

In 1 Corinthians 12 verse 25 Paul writes:

... that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

May those words of Paul be our guiding light

- to care for one another
- to work together
- to reach out to our community
- to rejoice together
- as the Body of Christ

And remember we each have a part to play

- we each have a particular contribution to make
- there is space and a place
- what you do makes a difference
- all the difference in the world