

That Paul – he’s really determined...

And he’s convinced that this is important, because he’s working the image right to the end - Hands, feet; eyes and ears; parts that are honoured; parts that are hidden - He does go on a bit, and that can be hard to handle. But his point is worth making - we are in this together.

He is writing to Corinthian’s who have come to faith in Christ. They have heard Paul’s story - likely many times. They have heard his lectures on the law, and how that law that once ruled Paul’s life has been redefined in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. These people, so far from the source of this saving story - with no discernible connection to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - are getting a crash course in this new twist in Jewish monotheism. There’s bound to be misunderstanding.

How do you reconcile this new faith with an old way of life? How do you accommodate the zealous and the cautious in the same assembly? How do you live in a new way among old friends and older temptations? Food was important to this Jesus - that much is true and Paul has also shared the story of the supper shared by Jesus and his friends on the night of Jesus’ arrest; what do you make of these strange habits - these significant rituals - this new mode of worship and devotion? What’s the proper way to bring this life-giving, life-changing faith to a new culture?

The language Paul uses has become one of my favourite metaphors for the church. “Now you are the body of Christ...” a single organism with many diverse parts. Complex connections and unique characteristics...As we develop deeper understanding of our own physical makeup, the

metaphor continues to work, but it likely made perfect sense to those who first heard this wonderful bit of wisdom too - either way, then and now, we know the church is a collection of bodies. A family of faith - community - a society - a global fellowship; large or small, the metaphor begins with hands and feet, ears and eyes, head and shoulders, knees and toes. And Paul would remind us that for the relationship to really work - for this faith journey to mean anything at all - we should remember that we're in it together.

And while he is urging us to get along - Paul's lesson depends on difference - "If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body...." Paul wants us to see the bigger picture. He could have said 'It's not all about you', and we would put that on tee shirts and bumper stickers and made someone a fortune, but Paul isn't selling merchandise - he is inviting a religious reformation.

He is trying to talk his Corinthian friends into Christ-like behaviour, and because we share this faith, we have claimed the concept - we use the metaphor (and sometimes put it on tee shirts and bumper stickers) but if Paul is calling us to Christ-like behaviour too, I wonder if there is more we can do with this imagery.

We have used Paul's words to excuse ourselves - to explain away odd behaviour and eccentric personalities in congregations.

"On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less

honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this”

To be sure, Paul wasn’t talking about people falling asleep in the choir, or shouting drunken challenges from the balcony, but we apply his wisdom where it suits us - and only in church settings - but I wonder...could this call to Christ-like cooperation help us navigate a world gone mad with divisive opinion? Could we not offer the same grace to our ‘opponents’ beyond the faith? Could this image describe a town; a country; a complex confederation of nations, beliefs, and behaviours - all covered by the gracious gaze of God?

If we are the body of Christ, then where are the limits of that body? Who decides where it begins and ends? Can we think beyond hands and feet for a minute, and harken back to the stories of our beginnings... everything out of nothing, and all called good. One man called for the blessing of all the nations. The strangest characters in the story of God’s “chosen people” seem to have the most important parts in that story, and Jesus’ story is the strangest of all.

Born humbly - raised in a garrison town - he possessed an authority that was difficult to explain. He spoke with those outside the fold - acted in love towards those who seemed to hate him; he offered peace to those who seemed irredeemable, and called the dead to new life. From one body of faith, Jesus crafted another; and we are called to follow his example.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” Not an unique, stand-alone monument to one man, but an integral part of the wider work of God, who is expressed in relationships - father son spirit - (head, shoulders, knees and toes) - who in Creating this vast, wonderful mess of a cosmos, has called all things good; even the fiddly bits that we don't appreciate, or the loud angry bits we don't quite understand.

Can we allow that maybe - just maybe - there is a way to work together within this 'body of grace' that benefits the whole enterprise, and thus gives glory to the One who calls us - cautions us - and comforts us?

In Jesus' name, and for God's sake, let it soon be so.