

The Body – Rev'd Catherine Eaton – Sunday 24th January 2010

Readings: Neh. 8.1-3,5-6,8-10, Ps 19, 1 Cor 12.12-31, Lk 4.14-21

Over the last months I've been learning a lot more about bodies and particularly about my body.

- I've been learning about the complexity and wonder of its systems and all its organs, and all the connections within us and between our environment and us. So now, as I massage my arm each morning and night, I give thanks for the beauty of the lymphatic system that moves the fluid around our body and protects us from infection. I've learnt about diet and health and things like the excesses of estrogen in our diets, which can contribute to breast and prostate cancer.
- I've learnt more about the relationship between emotions and physical health – the things we store away, and about the power of prayer and blessings and gratitude in everything. I'm learning now to give thanks even for the things that go wrong, like my cancer, because they are messengers for us and only with a positive, thankful attitude can they find their way to healing and integration.
- I'm beginning to learn how our view of the world, how we think about ourselves and our bodies and our emotions affects us. How health is essentially a spiritual matter. I've learnt more about body connections that Western science knows little about – that place in your foot that is connected to your head and so on, about energy flows. I'm learning about the connections at every level – our connectedness to the earth and what we eat and the elements.
- I'm learning to attend more to the connections within us, to each other, to our environment and to God's presence and beckoning love in and through it all.
- I've taken my body for granted – forced it to carry things it didn't have to – my stuff and other people's stuff. I've pushed it through limits of tiredness and relied on my immune system to fight too many battles.

But I've learnt a lot about another body over these years – the **body of Christ** here in this place.

- The Body of Christ that gathers here in Sorrento and Rye each week. We've put our body as community through its paces over the years but you are now a healthy body. You are in a good place and I want you to hold onto that image. You belong together because you are all different. If you all thought the same and did the same you wouldn't be a body – you'd just be a mush of cells.
- St Paul talks about the body of Christ in the second reading today and our need for each other. We need all our differences if we are to function. Where would the body be if we were all hands or all tongues? But St Paul has very limited imagination – he talks about hands and feet, eyes and ears, but there is so much more diversity which we know about now – all the hidden bits – the glands and organs and blood vessels, the teeth and toenails and noses.

While I talk to you I'd like you each to take a ribbon and a pin – don't fossic too much – just take one and pass it on. We've done crazy things before so you'll manage this.

- Take a ribbon and a pin and pin to the end of your neighbour's ribbon – to their ribbon, not to your neighbour! You'll need to turn around or lean across the aisle. Then pin the other end of your ribbon to another person's ribbon. Eventually no-one should have a loose end!
- All the ribbons are different – different lengths, quality – some are still tightly rolled – their potential is still to be revealed. Some are already quite unraveled. Some are twisted and some are broad and shiny. Some are hard and some are soft, but all of them will make up the whole. This is to remind us, remind you that you are all connected. All your differences belong together to make the whole body.
- If you have extra long ribbon, pin it also to another ribbon, join across the aisle.

These ribbons in all their differences remind us that the body of Christ is also diverse, essentially made up of many differences:

- Where would we be without the **nobly knees** of our community who force us to prayer and who bend down to tend the earth beneath us,
- or the ones who touch with the **gentleness of fingers**,
- the **arms** that embrace,
- the **eyes** that see the truth and the visions and the needs,
- the **teeth** that chew over things,
- the **noses** that detect the soft sweet aromas of community life and alert us to the sour smells,
- the **eyebrows** that are raised whenever there's something not quite true, that question us,
- the **backbones** that keep us standing and tall,
- and the **bottoms** that give us the chance to sit and rest,
- the **necks** that help us look in different directions,
- and the **mouths** that smile,
- the **hands** that do,
- and the **toe and finger nails** that protect us when we reach out or step out,
- the **livers** which process things for us,
- and the **kidneys** which filter out the rubbish – perhaps we need a few more kidneys,
- and the **hearts** which keep life and love running through us,
- and the **brains** which deal with things too complex for the rest of us like Diocesan Assessment forms.

And above it all as Paul says, **Christ is the head** – he is the one who guides and integrates the whole. But I have learnt a lot about the heart lately – the Chinese believe the heart is the main organ of the body – so maybe we need to remember **Christ is our heart as well** as our head.

Sometimes we clergy like to think we are the head. We sometimes let our egos get the better of us and we think we are the most important. But perhaps clergy are more like toe-nails – we serve a purpose for a while then when we get a bit bruised we fall off and you grow a new one!

Remember Christ is your head and Christ is your heart.

But as you pin the ribbons together note that sticking together – working and staying together

- a) takes effort and
- b) can be a bit painful

but as long as you persevere it will eventually seem no more than a pin-prick – you are together so remember this: the differences are essential and it will be costly at times to rise above the tensions which difference brings in order to stay together.

But you must stick together and remember everyone has value, everyone is essential. And don't just opt out when things are changing, because you may not know how important you are. You may think you're not important because you are not hands which do everything. But maybe you are an adrenal gland or a thyroid gland or a kidney – without you the body will become vulnerable.

And give thanks all the time even for the challenges, the ribbons you don't like, the things that seem negative – I have learnt to thank God for my cancer, for radiation treatment, for new weaknesses in my body now which are warning systems for me. Love everything and give thanks for everything because that will leave no room for cancer to grow in the body of Christ here; that will make you careful to avoid the fractures. Rest together and enjoy together and feed yourselves well with good food.

And if we pull on one ribbon – because your ribbons are all joined, you can feel the tug on the other side of the church – you affect each other. You are all connected – give thanks for that and love each other as the body of Christ – even as St Paul says, the bits that we cover up. Probably a couple of you at least are nurturing breasts for this body.

Remember – God sends people to this parish, both for what they bring to us and for what God needs to give them through us. You need to be here because you are part of what God is offering to those who come.

Not my best sermon – but give a copy to those absent today so they know they matter and are needed.

Stick around to build on the foundations we've laid otherwise, as I said before, you make my 10 years and Hans' 4 years in vain. God has made you one body, one body in Christ, one body who is Christ for this community in which you live.

Catherine Eaton