

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday 26th January 2025. Body Building.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Psalm 19:1

STF 1

All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
come ye before him and rejoice.

The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make:
we are his folk, he doth us feed;
and for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise;
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud, and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

For why, the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
the God whom heaven and earth adore,
from earth and from the angel host
be praise and glory evermore.

Prayers of adoration and confession

Heavenly Father on this winter's day we bring you our thanks and praise for your never ending love. The heavens do declare your glory. Even on days when it's cold and grey, your sun still shines and the changing seasons reflect your daily unfailing provision. We do have so much to rejoice about if only we would stop and ponder on the multitude of ways that you show your love to us each day. The wonders of creation. Even in the harshest environments we can find nature bursting forth and flowering in unexpected places. The joy of human love reminds us that we are part of your family here on earth. We thank you for every expression of kindness and thoughtfulness even from those who we might deem as strangers. To you be praise and glory for evermore. **Amen.**

Heavenly Father we wish that we could always be grateful for your mercies. Mindful of the needs of others and loving and giving in the same generous spirit that you impart on us. Forgive us for those times when we have been too wrapped up in ourselves to notice the beauty of life all around us. The perfect sunrise, the kindness of strangers or the daily blessings that we receive from you. Help us to be more grateful for all of your gifts and the needs of others. Quick to respond with gratitude and slow to act if at all negatively. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer, **Amen**

Bible reading. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a Unity and Diversity in the Body

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don't need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don't need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. Love is indispensable and yet I will show you the most excellent way.

Reflection. Did you make any New Year's Resolutions this year? If so, how many have you broken? Do you know what the five most popular resolutions are? Take up a new hobby. Improve finances. Improve relationships. Stop smoking. Lose weight and exercise.

As we travel through this new year I want to suggest that we try to take on a New Year's resolution that we can do as a congregation. Whether we are physically able to meet in church or are part of the many of us who are blessed with the opportunity to join in through the circuit written services. What I am going to suggest is we do some body building exercises! Don't Panic! 🙏 Exercises based on St Paul's writings to the church at Corinth. They certainly seemed to need some personal training. Paul wrote two long letters to them full of advice and encouragement. They certainly seemed to be a congregation with a whole lot of problems! The Apostle Paul stayed in Corinth eighteen long months working through the many problems that divided the Corinthian church and its into this setting that he tells them that it's time to get into spiritual shape by doing some body building.

First exercise...get comfortable in the body, and find your place.

When you think of your physique, I wonder if there are any parts you would prefer people do not see? Are there parts that you are not comfortable with? We know some parts of ourselves can be improved by diet and exercise. By finding the right balance and combination of lifestyle to improve and feel as comfortable as we can with what we have. What about our position as part of the body of Christ?

St Paul gives us a kind of puzzling perspective. We are all parts of a body. Each one of us a certain piece essential and connected to the whole body.

I am a bit of a puzzle nerd. I love jigsaw puzzles. The more complex the more enjoyable. Even the baked beans or smarties puzzles are fun to me. I like pictures too and the puzzles I enjoy most are those which don't have a finished picture to follow. I love seeing how the seemingly impossible comes together to make a fabulous picture.

I have even been known to do a puzzle with out any pictures on it. You still end up with a blank rectangle with all the oddest of shaped pieces holding onto each other and together making the perfect shape.

Now you might or might not like jigsaw puzzles, but work with me. If you could be a jigsaw piece 🧩 which piece would you be? The corner or an edge or something that will make people think and be surprised at how despite being an unusual shape you are just as integral as the other pieces in order to create the finished picture? What ever you choose there is going to be an outline or shape that will have some bumps and curves, but those parts will interconnect with the rest of the piece's.

St Paul's point is that each piece of the body of Christ, the church, is part of a united whole, but the pieces are not uniform. We see this in verse 14: "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many." Just as our human bodies are one unit made up of many individual ingredients, so too, the body of Christ is an entity with a plethora of pieces.

Exercise 2united we stand, a powerful body for Christ.

I used to collect Peanuts cartoons and paste them into a scrap album. In one Peanuts cartoon, Lucy is demanding that Linus change the channel on the TV and threatens him with her fist if he won't do it. Linus isn't too frightened by this threat and says, "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" With a scowl on her face, Lucy replies, "These five fingers. Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold!" Immediately Linus responds, "Which channel do you want?" As he's walking toward the TV, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organised like that?"

The cartoon amused me but I'm certainly not condoning Lucy's methods. However this is a great illustration of how the church is to work together. Individually we're nothing, unorganised, but when we're curled into a single unit, we form into something that is amazing to behold. It's only when our many pieces come together that we can make a difference that reflects God's power. We are all needed and essential. Even if we feel that our part is so small.

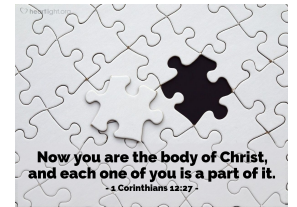
Exercise 3.....recognise your strengths and importance.

Fingers on their own are quite small. There are so many parts of the body that seem insignificant and even sometimes not quite what we want them to be.

Many years ago I asked a member of our congregation, who was a chiropodist, what I could do about my discoloured and battered toenails? Too many bangs and dropping things on them had taken it's toll. His advice, "keep them clean and paint them pink". I wonder if there are parts of your body that you don't really like? As we get older the list might increase! But from our earliest years people have often been unhappy about certain parts of their bodies. The colour of their hair, eyes, skin. The shape of their ears or nose or chin. So the list could go on. I have a good friend who took many years to feel comfortable about the port wine stain on her face. Which makes my battered toenails seem insignificant with what that person has had to accept. So often the problem is that we compare ourselves with others and see ourselves as inferior. Or other people can't accept that we are different from them. We get caught up in comparison traps and try to judge and justify. We make assumptions by the wrong perspectives. St Paul tells us that each piece is indispensable and not inferior. In verses 15-17, Paul is addressing those of us who may feel inferior: "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body."

Exercise 4: recognise the importance of all the parts.

A foot may feel less important than a hand and an ear may feel mediocre compared to an eye. Paul is establishing the truth that everyone is valuable and necessary.



Imagine yourself boarding a plane for a lovely holiday. As you fasten your seat belt and settle in to your seat for the flight, you smile because of the prospect of the coming days and that you got a good package deal. The pilot then comes on the intercom and makes this announcement: "This is your captain speaking. The reason your ticket was so much cheaper is that we've done away with the people you never see – the maintenance folks who service the plane, the navigator who is only needed on foggy nights like tonight, and the air-traffic controller up in the tower. We also didn't think it was necessary to have those security people checking for concealed explosives etc. Have a nice flight." I don't imagine that many of you would want to reserve a seat on this plane. We will definitely be wanting to leave! When we think about the number of people who make it possible for us to have a safe flight it's incredible and so many go unseen and acknowledged. When we consider the number of people needed to be the body of Christ in our community we are equally grateful for each person's contribution. In our churches we tend to think about the importance of those people with job titles as being the most important. However when you think about why you became involved in the church and felt that you were accepted and a part of the church. Was it necessarily the Minister or steward that made you feel that way? Or was it the person who shook your hand, or gave you a warm smile or helped you find your place in the service book? I could mention a myriad of other seemingly trivial examples that actually became the turning point for others finding their home within the body of Christ. St Paul emphasises how every single person is important in portraying the body of the church in the world.

Another Peanut's cartoon, Snoopy is lying on top of his kennel feeling very sorry for himself. He has a broken leg. He thought, "My body blames my foot for not being able to go places. My foot says it was my head's fault, and my head blamed my eyes...My eyes say my feet are clumsy, and my right foot says not to blame him for what my left foot did..." Snoopy then looked out at the audience and confessed, "I don't say anything because I don't want to get involved." Snoopy's body sounds a lot like the church body, at times.

St Paul is encouraging us to realise that we are all Important and needed. We have gifts that need to be used for the whole body to function. Whether that is being a foot or hand that physically carries out certain functions in the church or the vital breath that breathes out prayers for the body to function.

Exercise 5...Heads up!

We can't ignore the question about who is the head? The most important part perhaps? After all we do speak about 'the head' in so many different areas of life. The person with the power and who literally 'heads up' the organisation. Jesus in the gospel reading for today has addressed the church with the words that are a fulfilment of God's prophecy.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:14-21

Jesus is the head of the body and we are the supporting parts. St Paul in the last few verses of our reading tells us how we are each given individual gifts to be able to share in being the body of Christ. How we use our God given gifts will affect the whole body. 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.' We know all too well the phrase, "use it or lose it". No doubt a driver in many New Year's resolutions about self improvement. It is equally important for us as the body of Christ. We need to use the gifts God has given us. We need to keep connected and engaged with each other so that together we might make Christ known to those around us and to the building up of the body of Christ in our world.

STF 673

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.

In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Prayers of Intercession *Let us use some of the parts of the body to inspire our prayers for others.*

The Head. We take a moment to think about people who 'head up' organisations. Particularly those who are in the news today. We pray for all in positions of power and authority. May they use their strength and voice for justice for all those they represent. Be with them when decisions are difficult and there are no easy solutions. Help them to be wise and fair in all their dealings and to take time to care for themselves.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

The shoulders We pray for all who are shouldering heavy burdens. We pray especially for those people and events in the news at this time. The economic crisis has caused such widespread suffering and we pray for families struggling to cope. We pray for those who are struggling and for those trying to help others to survive in these difficult times. We thank you for the multitude of agencies that provide aid and support. Give to them the resources they need and encourage us to use the gifts you have given us to support all in need.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

The armpits...! Now that might seem a strange part to choose to inspire our prayers for others, but without armpits were would the body be? Let us take time to ponder about those we desperately need to service our society and without them where would we be? They may not have glamorous roles but they are equally important to our lives. We thank God for all engaged in the menial and hidden tasks of life. So often poorly paid and unacknowledged until we feel that they have not done their job or duty. Help us to open our eyes and to use our smiles and our resources to honestly express our gratitude to those who are so often overlooked and under appreciated in our society.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

The extremities. In harsh conditions you have to protect the extremities, the hands and feet. We pray for all who may seem to be in the extremities of our world. Living in harsh conditions. Whether through warfare or struggling with the ravages of climate change and natural disasters. We remember those particularly in the news today and those who in recent times have come to our attention, but the media has moved onto the latest crisis. We pray for all in need and who are suffering today. Bring them to places of peace and protection.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

The other parts.. The adult human body is made up of 100 trillion cells,206 bones,600 muscles and nearly 78 organs. It would be impossible to put a prayerful need to all those parts. Yet we know each part is essential and when one part suffers the other parts suffer too. Lord it's just as impossible for us to bring you our prayers for every part of the world that is in need today. We thank you that none are out of your sight or care. Help us to do what we can with the gifts you have given to us to help those in need. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer.

STF 608

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;
con centred all, through Jesu's name,
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown,
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

The Blessing

May the beauty of God be reflected in our eyes, the love of God be reflected in our hands, the wisdom of God be reflected in our words, and the knowledge of God flow from our hearts, that all might see, and seeing, believe. **Amen.**