

April 26, 2015
Falcon Heights Church UCC
Falcon Heights, MN
The Rev. Anne Swallow Gillis

Fourth Sunday in Easter
I Corinthians 12:12-27
Values Sunday

THE BODY OF CHRIST

It's kind of an odd way to talk about the church, isn't it? The Body of Christ. The Apostle Paul uses this image in a letter to a church he had started in Corinth (present-day Greece). It was a sophisticated Greek city. His readers would have been familiar with contemporary writings of Plutarch, the Greek historian, who used the Body image to describe the political state. And in that political state, the lower-class plebeians were lesser than high-class wealthy patricians. The term would have been familiar to Paul's congregation. They were used to this comparing of a human body to a group of people.

At the point he writes this letter, Paul is one of the early leaders of the small group of Jesus' followers. He travels all over the Mediterranean talking about the teachings and presence of Jesus and forming small communities of the early church. He started a group like that in the city of Corinth, where people of all different social classes, slaves and free people, rich and poor, would come together to talk, pray, sing, read scriptures and share a meal of bread and wine at the Lord's Table together. They would make sure everyone had enough, and that there was food and money left over for the poor. But they were all so different. They struggled with getting to know each other, hanging out together, listening to God's direction together. Paul writes in his a letter to them that he knows this is hard, because they are all so different. But they need to keep working at it, because, they are in fact the Body of Christ on earth now. Jesus the Christ is no longer walking around on earth, but his spirit is with them. And....his Spirit dwells in each of them and all of them together. To try and explain this amazing idea, Paul says: You are the Body of Christ, and individually members of one another. You are the hands and feet, eyes and ears, belly button and toes of Jesus Christ here on earth! You are all connected. You matter to each other. No hierarchy. Unlike the political state, implied Paul, you are all of equal importance to the whole.

Last December, I first started meeting with our Discovery Team. Our Executive Board and I put this group together from all your suggestions; they were to lead us in the work of figuring out who is FHCUCC and what does God call you to next. We pulled together a very mixed group of people: different ages, different experiences here in the church, each with different ideas about what happened with the previous two ministers. Really different. And they started meeting, and talking together and listening to one another and trying on this idea that they were all part of this Body here at Falcon Heights Church.

Early on, I asked them to do an exercise with me. Think of this church, I said, imagine this church, as the living Body of Christ. Imagine it as a body, a person. What? Yes, try it. If this church were a body, a person, right now, what would it be like? Well, they thought and imagined....and started to share. Try it yourself. What would you say? What do you see when you think about this? A man or a woman? About how old would you say this body, this person, is? What kind of shape is it in? What is important to this person? What does it value? What challenges does it face? Here's a hard one....what part of the body are you? What abilities and gifts are yours to share for the increased well-being of this body?

I love how the ancient writer Paul talks about how the parts of the body all belong together. All of us play different parts in the body and are all connected to each other. The hand can't say to the foot: I don't like you very much, you don't belong here. Paul says that when one part of the body suffers, all suffer. I think of that when we share joys and concerns. We are happy and we are sad, all of us, depending on what is happening to each individual member.

As you now move from this Sanctuary into small groups, you will be invited to explore what this Body of Christ, FHCUCC, might look like in the future if it were really thriving, really healthy and helping all of us change and grow in Christ. What would be most important, most valued among you at that point? What would relationships be like among all of you? "Members one of another," wrote Paul. What would your connections with and impact on the wider community be like? Picture being a truly vibrant and transformative church. I invite you to imagine what that would look like. Amen.