

Beyond Families - sermon by Cedric Martin

Good morning TUMC and happy mother's day. Today we're thinking about rites of passage, mentoring, and really how we can be lifelong learners of faith. I mean, what better day than mother's day to celebrate rites of passage? Who else is going to celebrate all the little milestones than our mothers? Thanks to my mother and step mother, who I see are on the call, and thanks to all the other mothers here today for all that you do!

On that note, today's theme is "Beyond Families" I want to acknowledge that mother's day isn't a celebration for everyone and that today can be challenging for some people. I do want to say that a chosen community (family) can be just as important. I hope if today is hard for you that you can feel loved and chosen by TUMC.

As you heard before, that scripture retelling was performed by me. It was an "Adventures in Odyssey" script that I adapted and created back in 2014 for Hidden Acres when I was Camp Pastor that summer. (SHARE SCREEN) If you can't see me sharing my screen try switching to speaker view. The imagery that Paul uses in 1st Corinthians is helpful in a camp setting. You've got a Camp pastor, a nature director, program coordinator, cook, maintenance, medic, lifeguards, and of course counsellors or cabin leaders. If you put them together you make a body. I think sometimes our body can look a little messy. Like if you put all the characters together from the video earlier... well you get something like this.

I think Paul wrote this letter to the Corinth church for a few reasons. There was obviously a bit of a divide. There was no doubt it was a diverse city. As Paul says, there were former slaves, free-born people, Greeks, and Jews. They were a minority church, of probably about 40-100 people in the context of many other deities, and temples, people of faith. The temple to Asclepius would have been one of those. Asclepius was the son of Apollo in Greek mythology, and he was the god of Medicine. He was part of the reason that the snake and staff imagery we have is associated with medicine. It's likely that in his temples they had "Healing" non-venomous snakes that would slither around sick people curing their wounds. As a quick aside, somewhere along history the two different images got confused. The image of the two snakes on a staff is actually from a story of Hermes breaking up a fight between two snakes with a stick. Not much to do with healing, but semi-related to non-violence which I think is cool. Anyways... In the temples of Asclepius you would see images of body parts. Some made of clay, some painted. This was either used to pray to Asclepius or to thank Asclepius for healing your wounds of a particular body part.

Now it's believed that Paul spent about 18 months, previously, in Corinth. So he would've been familiar with these temples, and seeing the severed body parts, the imagery in and around the temple. This is likely where Paul got the imagery for his passage in chapter 12, when he was writing to the people in Corinth. He wanted to encourage his church to stick together, and not think individualistically, like a single hand or a foot or a head.

In today's theme of "Beyond Families," I want us to think about the different body parts of our church, and how they all fit together. Perhaps if you have a printed directory handy, or after the service go to the virtual TUMC directory and look at pages 24-29. You'll get 2 things from this exercise, 1 an excuse to review your own entry and tell Mike Dehann if it's correct, and 2 scanning those pages, 24-29, you can get a sense of how important each part of the body is.

If the Property Committee would say, "Because I am not the preaching team, I do not belong to the church," that would not make it any less a part of the church. And if the Youth Group would say, "Because I am not a Treasurer, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

As we think "Beyond Families" I am very grateful for the many different parts of our church body. (STOP SHARE) This past year we have felt very divided. It feels like we have a bit of a disconnect between our body parts. If you're someone who needs a metaphor, it feels like we have weak circulation. The lockdowns have been long and many. The physical isolation has been terrible.

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There has been tremendous loss this year. Family, friends, and loved ones have passed. I think of the beautiful, but hard service of eternity Sunday that was held online this year. Work, school, sports, plays, choirs, camps, extracurriculars are all among the things we've cancelled, and there are many more to mention. Mental health is a huge issue. My work with Unmute at Theatre of the Beat taught me that Domestic Abuse is on the rise. It's been a challenging year.

But the body is still very much alive. We just can't give up on stretching and exercising. Working to improve our circulation. And I mean that as encouragement, not as criticism. Think about the fantastic things that came out of this year when we started to stretch and exercise. The body was at it's best. The finance department said we need help to raise the roof, and a silent auction was born. The caring team said we need to touch our toes and reach to our extremities and TUMC TAG was born. The youth group said we need more intergenerational activities and the TUMC boardwalk eye-spy was born. We've had book clubs, mailouts, deliveries, virtual drinks, talent nights, storytelling, scavenger hunts, baking nights, after church meetings, and holiday celebrations. We had feet to carry us and hands to lift up.

"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." I lament and I rejoice. I love and hurt and grow all with this community.

Beyond Families was the title to help bridge today's gathering, which is focused on Rite's of Passage, on mentoring, and on being a community together. For Alyse and I, and I know many others in the community, Toronto is not very close to family, geographically. This is our chosen community. And chosen TUMC has. I mean look at all the staff members that were hired from within our congregation. Obviously, I believe there are some benefits to that. This past week as we were planning for today's service I had the opportunity to ponder the different ways we mark Rites of passage here at TUMC, both formal relationships, and informal gatherings. We have the mentoring program of course. Where I have greatly benefited from Elliot being my partner to walk alongside. I feel like I have learned so much from him these past few years. What I miss most right now is being able to go and see live shows, art, music, and theatre with him. TUMC also has many informal Rite's of Passage. But just like the body we shouldn't remember them in isolation. From baby showers, and wedding showers, to baptism, membership transfer, funerals, graduation, loss of jobs, grade 3 bibles, new careers, or retirements. We journey together and grow together. This is where today's second scripture passage comes into play with Iron sharpens Iron. One human heart reflects another.

Yesterday MCEC held a virtual 'youth workers, pastors, and those who tend to youth,' retreat. One of the questions was 'where are the youth leading you'? Since I had sermon in my head I of course pictured the youth group as the legs of the body when that question came up. But as for an answer I had to think about that one for a bit. I think something that is true for both our Youth and Jr. Youth group is their innate ability to ask questions. We've played into the silly side of this with some games at Youth or Jr. Youth. This past Friday we had a Youth event that Peter led where the whole point was to try and start the meeting, but everyone else would question your authority. Everyone was a Parish Council Meeting member and you could Read a standing order, raise a point of order, claim a title or make an authority check. Once you had enough points you could use your authority to start the parish council meeting. It was quite humorous. Feel free to ask more about it after the service. Similarly, we have run 2 sessions of "The Debaters" at youth, based on the CBC program with the same name.

Now in different settings we have grown and been pushed by the questions we get asked by our youth and jr youth. Why do we do things a certain way? Why did Jesus yell at a fig tree? Why aren't we talking about this in Church? Why are we talking about this in Church? What about these important social justice issues? I think something our youth are great at is asking questions. I'm often asked by others in the church if the youth would be interested in taking on a certain task or activity. Sometimes it's great to have youth learn the way we've done it before and to take on a specific task that's requested of them. But sometimes, it could be very

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different if we had the youth on the planning end, asking the why questions. Something for the Headley's in our mix to ponder.

Thinking back to our Corinthians Passage, one thing that I don't think is acknowledged in Paul's writing, if I'm allowed to add a critique, is the opportunity to try new things even if it doesn't work out. The retelling I did I wrote back in 2014 as I mentioned. I've done a lot more writing and I've grown in my skills since then. So I often cringe at my old writings. But instead of changing it I decided to debrief it here with you. The character of John Lightfoot, wanted to try doing some different jobs to see how it would go. Ultimately he went off on his own and he tried some things and he failed when he was on his own. But I think it was more of a failing of the community than a failing of the individual. The community failed him in that case by not allowing him the opportunity to try new things even if it doesn't go as smoothly or if it looked different. Or if things don't run as efficiently as they could have. I think sometimes, for myself included, we get trapped in this idea that everything has to run perfectly, smoothly and efficiently. If I'm allowed to call out what we're going through right now, as a community, I would say our worship leaders feel a large burden to have a perfectly run worship service on zoom every Sunday. The standard has been set very high, there are expectations about how things should run. Even for myself, when I'm not a digital usher, if someone's unmuted I want to immediately try to mute them if they're not supposed to be unmuted or I think 'wow I could have run that smoother'. But that's something I need to deal with myself and my own struggles of trying to make everything perfect. So for what it's worth, I am sorry for the times where my expectations have intimidated others, and I'm sorry for any anxiety our worship leaders, digital ushers, preachers, readers, and contributors feel.

In reality, it's not about being perfect at running things on Zoom it's about being a Community together. It's about discovering where we fit within the body, for a period of time. I think that the church body is about allowing us to try some new things, move around see where we fit for that season and then decide if that's where we want to stay or if we want to keep shuffling around. Why not let John Lightfoot head up the meeting for a bit. Let's hear what Miss Lipman has to offer to the group, more than just talking **at** people, but what are her ideas? What problems does ICY see within the group, not just problems that they want to go fix outside of the group? For as much as Paul's body metaphor is helpful, it also subconsciously locks us into specific boxes. It's okay to not always be the legs. So I think a challenge to myself and to the TUMC Community is 'let's offer Grace', let's not body shame ourselves, and learn to love and accept who we are how we are, stretch marks and all. So if I were to rewrite that skit, that retelling of 1st Corinthians, I wonder what it would look like with Mr. Headley allowing John to try new things if he wants to.

In the theme of keeping everything running efficiently and perfectly, I did promise Audrey that I would keep my sermon short this morning. So as a brief recap I encourage you to think about the different parts of the body within this community. Pull out your directory, or go to the TUMC website, look at what the different body parts do and who they are, currently. What body parts need some self-care right now, a foot rub perhaps? And how can we continue to be gracious and loving to ourselves without having this idea of everything having to run perfectly? Finally, 'mentoring', 'Rites of Passage', the title 'Beyond family', all of this is just to say we need to work alongside each other, no one person, body part, or group needs to be above the rest or head of the rest, but alongside each other as brothers, sisters, siblings, family, chosen community and those who don't conform to any of those titles. Thank you TUMC, I love you, Amen.