

All for One, One for All

Let me start with a question to consider. What would you say is the most important part of a car? I want to give you 30 seconds in each of our locations to chat with someone near you and share your responses about **what you think is the most important part of a car...**

Now, obviously I can't hear your responses over video, but perhaps some of you said the engine, cause without an engine a car can't even run. Or maybe you said the steering wheel, cause how else would you turn where you want to go? Or maybe you said the gas tank or charging port, cause without fuel or power the rest of the parts are useless. Well, if I had to answer that question – up until recently – I probably would've said *the tires*. Cause, like the saying "where the rubber meets the road", the tires are really the *only part* of the car that actually touch the road and ultimately carry you from Point A to Point B, right? And also cause the significance of tires was highlighted for me recently when our daughter who's a new driver called late one night on the side of the highway with a flat, making our van undriveable! (You'll be glad to know though that Hailey has a dad who's so resourceful and mechanically inclined that after a long look at the spare tire together, I used that important teaching moment to give Hailey the clear and confident instructions to call the professionals who could tow us away!)

But as it turns out, those aren't the only car-part woes we've had recently which have taught me a few more things about important parts in vehicles, and may have even altered how I'd answer the "most important part" question today. You see, not long before Hailey's flat tire incident, we had a much older van that was beginning to act up in some mysterious ways. While on some days it'd work just fine, on the next, the windshield wipers and blinkers were non-functioning. (Which Lindsay will tell you, made for some fun attempts at hand signals!) Or worse, there were times it would struggle to get up to speed or would stall at an intersection. Or some days, not even start at all! Only to mysteriously start working fine again days later.

So once again, I put my top-notch mechanical skills to the test, and with the expertise of AI, discovered that we were experiencing a malfunctioning “MICU” in our minivan – you know, the **Multiplex Integrated Control Unit**. Till then, I had never heard of a MICU, let alone had it on my radar as an important part in a car. But as it turns out, if and when your MICU isn’t playing its part, that may become, like in our case, **the last time you see your vehicle**.

Today we are in the second week of a series we’re calling *Gifted* – all about how the church works and how church work happens. Last week, Jenn Surtees kicked off our series by teaching us that the work of the church is meant to be done by *all* members of the church, and not just *some*. That according to the NT, every follower of Jesus is considered a saint, minister, and priest intended to play a critical part in the work of the church together. And today, we want to begin to see how that actually happens – like the parts of a car working together – by looking at a similar metaphor in the NT. So if you have a Bible or Bible app, let’s turn to **Romans 12:4-5** to begin to see how the Apostle Paul says the church should work.

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body.

So here, Paul likens the church to the human body. That, like a healthy human body, how the church works is through a diverse variety of parts that, while each have importance and uniqueness on their own, actually get their greatest significance and purpose from being a part of and contributing their part to the body as a whole. That in the same way a minivan’s Multiplex Integrated Control Unit is a unique and complex component all by itself, it finds its greatest meaning, purpose, and ultimate value by sending its signals from the ignition to the engine, so that the engine can fire the pistons, which can then begin to turn the axles, which can spin the tires, which can ultimately get you to where you want to go!

But not only is Paul using this “body” metaphor to give us an image for how the church works with a variety of parts, but also to help us see and understand what the work of the church does in bringing the body of Jesus to life today. When he says, ***“The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body.”*** That when all the parts of the body are working together, Paul says the church essentially becomes the real-life embodiment of the risen Jesus – *his* hands and feet, *his* heart and lungs – living, breathing, and working in the world today.

In fact, this is such a prominent reality for Paul, that he writes virtually the exact same thing in a parallel passage in **1 Corinthians 12:27**: ***“Now you are the body of Christ.”*** That by the unleashing of Jesus’ risen Holy Spirit into the lives of people who put their faith in him, the community of Jesus followers, made up of a whole variety of parts, now has the opportunity, if not the obligation, to be and work as the body of Christ on earth today.

From there, Paul then starts to get a little more practical in **Romans 12:6-8** to help us understand how this vision of Christ’s body with many parts actually works in tangible ways.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

First, Paul reminds us that we all have *different* gifts. That each one of us is unique and has unique abilities to do certain things well. That, like a car or a body, there are a lot of *different* parts that are required to make it work as it should. And although it may sound obvious or redundant, Paul obviously felt it would be helpful for his audience (as I think it is for us today) to make sure they understood that their unique gifts were in fact *gifts*. That these gifts came from Somewhere *and* Someone beyond themselves – beyond their own strength and ability. That’s what he means by ***“according to the grace given to each of us.”***

You see, the Greek word for “grace” is actually the exact same word for “gift.” And so, Paul essentially says: *We have different gifts according to the gift given to us.* That whatever our unique strength, ability, or capacity, it’s not something we’ve earned, or gained, or achieved on our own, but has been *given to us* by the grace – or *gift-giving nature* – of God.

And then he goes on to list a sampling of different spiritual gifts that God has given to the church; from prophesying and serving, to teaching and encouragement, to giving and leading, to showing mercy and compassion. But his main point here, is that, among the diverse variety of this particular sampling of spiritual gifts, whatever your gift is, you have been given your gift in order to *use it*. As he says: ***“If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy; if serving, then serve; if teaching, then teach...”*** Point being: Your gift has been given to you for a purpose. Not to be kept for yourself, but to be used and shared for the good of the church. To give your gift away in and through the body of Christ you are a part of.

Then finally, the most critical part of what it means for the many parts of the body of Christ to work together in the church as they should, according to Paul’s instructions in Romans 12, is found in how he opened this passage in **verse 3**, where he started by saying:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

That, when it comes to describing the variety of parts and unique gifts that make the church work together as the body of Christ, Paul first anchors the entire conversation in the condition of our hearts and motivations. Saying that: *In whatever grace or gift any of us have been given, do not think of yourself more highly or more important than you ought.* That if, as the tires, you think you’re the most important part of the car, then let me tell you that the MICU may just end up having something to say about that!

At the same time, though, Paul wants to make clear that the inverse is also true. That as we think of ourselves with *sober judgment* based on the grace and gifts God *has* given us, that we won't think about ourselves too lowly either. In fact, Paul makes this point abundantly clear in his expanded teaching on the body of Christ in the **1 Corinthians 12:22-23** passage:

In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honourable are those we clothe with the greatest care.

That like the many parts of our bodies, prominence is not the same as significance. That while our facial features are what we see and attend to every day, helping us know and recognize one another, our internal organs are far more vital to our overall life and health.

As one more illustration, back to my mechanical misfortunes for just a moment... I remember a road trip our family was on years ago in our now-dead minivan, when we stopped for gas at the halfway point, where, as I was filling up, a guy across the parking lot curiously started bending down to see something he found interesting under our van. (Which, by the way, always gives you a lot of confidence in the vehicle you're driving.) And then he came over and kindly mentioned that something seemed to be dangling below our engine. And sure enough, as I bent down to inspect, there was some kind of plastic flap barely holding on and basically dragging on the ground at that point. So, once again, I put my mechanical know-how to the test, reached as far as I could underneath and simply ripped it off so we could get back on the road! And while this plastic debris-shield probably wasn't as vital as some other parts of our car, the reality is, it was there for a reason. That even though it was hidden and by no means prominent – like some of the most delicate and vital parts of our bodies – it was there to play an important role in helping protect our engine in a way that probably could've otherwise extended the life of our vehicle.

So, putting this all together, when it comes to the work of the church being done by all of the church and not just some of the church, the Apostle Paul says that the way this happens is through a variety of diverse spiritual gifts that God has uniquely given to each one of us – no gift or part any more or less important than another. And, like all the parts of the body or the parts of a car, while each is unique and has significance on its own, every single part gets its greatest meaning and significance from *playing its part* and *contributing its gift* to the body. And that that's what ultimately makes the body work – *the church work* – as the real-life embodiment of the hands and feet of Jesus – the body of Christ – in the world today!

And friends, that's what we have the invitation and opportunity to be a part of here together in our local church and body of Christ at Southridge. As this is exactly how our church is intended to work with the many gifts and roles and parts that are needed in our community, with all parts contributing and all parts working together. From people who use their gift of leadership as elders or Life Group leaders. To people who use their gift of serving in First Impressions or administration. To people who use their gift of teaching in student ministry or small groups. To people who use their gift of encouragement to look out for others and build others up. To people who use their gift of giving to give generously and provide for those in need. To people who use their gift of mercy and compassion to cultivate friendships with those on the margins and to work for justice. All alongside many more gifts that are of critical importance to making the church – the body of Christ – work as it should.

Because, once again, as Paul said in **1 Corinthians 12:27**:

All of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a part of it.

So, the questions for today are: *What part are you? And are you willing to play the part you're meant to play so that the church and body of Christ can work as it should?*

And, like a healthy body or brand-new car, can you imagine what our local church and body of Christ here at Southridge could look like if every single part was fully functioning?

Because, like a car, each part has an essential role to play. But the whole thing only really works when we all work together – firing on all cylinders, with a diversity and variety of parts, living out our purpose and potential as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world!

To help us do that, as we continue this series in the weeks to come, we're going to take an even closer look at the many unique gifts God has given to each one of us, to consider our unique wirings and passions, strengths and abilities, talents and skillsets, and to help us see and understand the part we are called to play – including through helpful tools like a Spiritual Gifts Assessment. So let's make sure to continue to participate each week in this series!

But for today, what we want to know and understand most of all, is that if the work of the church is meant to be done by all of us, and if that only happens when all the many parts of the church are working together, then that not only includes but absolutely requires each and every one of us. As we all have a part to play. With the incredible invitation to be a real and vital part of the body of Christ on earth, all because of what Christ has done for all of us.

And to help us celebrate that this morning and embrace being the body of Christ together, we want to respond by receiving the bread and juice of communion – the Lord's Supper. The simple but vital elements of food and drink that remind us of the body of Christ broken for us and the blood of Christ shed for us. And specifically for today, to know and experience and take part in the divine reality that *Christ gave up his body to make us his body*. That that's the profound and miraculous reality we're invited to take part in. That through the loving sacrifice of his death, we have now been invited and empowered to be part of living Jesus' risen life together as his body.

So I'll invite the band and our communion servers forward in each of our locations, and in a moment, you'll receive specific instructions and invitation in your location to participate in communion. But before we do, I'll take a moment to pray, thanking God for all he has done for us so that all of us could be invited to play our part in his body, his church, and his life of love on earth!

Let's pray...