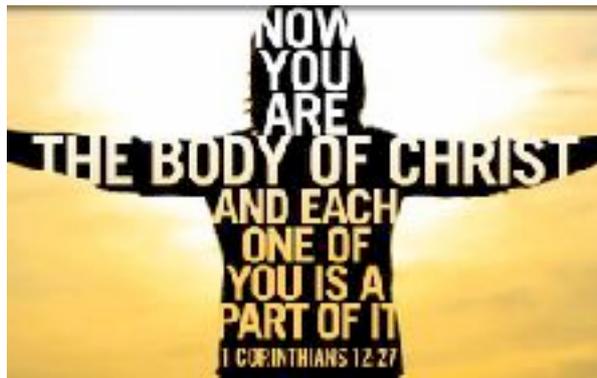


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Third Sunday of Epiphany
27 January 2019

“'No Division' in a Bilateral Body”

Fourth in a sermon series entitled “Inclusivity Matters”

Scripture: I Corinthians 12:12-31a



My friend, Stephanie, has studied Anatomy and Physiology, International Relations. And because of that, she corrected me and told me that while the term ‘binary’ works for theology and thus for my sermon title, ‘bilateral’ is better if referring to anatomy. So, I stand corrected and I am now changing the title to “‘No Division’ in a Bilateral Body”.

Structural Plan:

- The human body has certain general characteristics.
- Among the characteristics are a backbone, a tube within a tube organization, and bilateral symmetry.



Eyes, ears, cheeks (butt and face), lungs, kidneys, legs, feet, ovaries, testes, arms, hands - these are just some of the parts of our anatomy that are bilateral.

binary thinking



In another sense, I think our minds are also bilateral ('right brain' and 'left brain'). As humans we seem to think bilaterally or, in agreement with my title, we think insidiously in binary terms. For example, how many elected independent representatives do we have in our government? Not many.



It's either Republican or Democrat - between which we feel we must choose. The great state of Vermont is one of the very few states with an independent representative. And where has this binary thinking gotten us? Gridlock, block voting, allegiance to a party rather to a

nation or to even ethics and morals, and to a massive government shutdown that thankfully has ended.



We tend to think insidiously in binary terms in regards to sex and sexuality - despite throughout the millennia there is evidence that humans' sexuality has existed on a spectrum - some being heterosexual, some homosexual and many in between. We know that some human beings are transgender, exhibiting characteristics that are both male and female - androgyny. Some human beings are even biologically created female, XX. Some humans are created male, XY. Some are created both. Hermaphrodites. When conservative evangelicals pontificate that "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" they are just plain wrong. When people oppose homosexuality or transgender identities, they are not only theologically incorrect, they are scientifically and factually incorrect. Most plants are hermaphrodites, having both pistils and stamens.

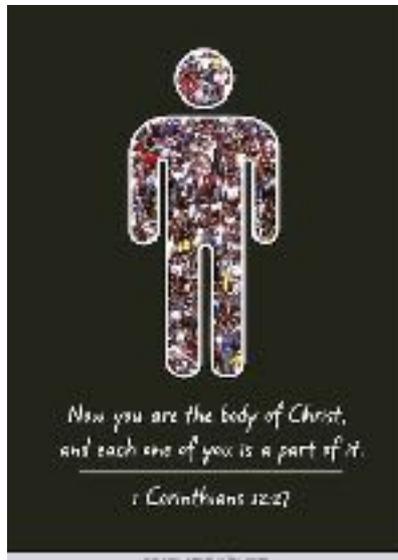
Worms are too. Snails. I would love to see a transgender bathroom in our church. Or better yet, let us dream big, let us have all unisex bathrooms in our church. I dream this not to be politically correct, but to be scientifically and thus theologically correct.



Binary thinking has done enormous damage to human beings throughout history. Black and White. Guess what? There are both - Barack Obama. Male and female - guess what there are both. Republican and Democrat - liberal and conservative. Guess what some are neither. Catholic and Protestant. Guess what, there are some of us who love both traditions. Christian and unbeliever. Guess what. Both exist in the same person. Some of the people who worship in our church you may not consider Christian, but we learn from and benefit from one another. Likewise sinners and saints - we are all mixed bags.

I don't deny that there are males and females. Just as I don't deny that there are two legs, two arms and two legs. I also can't deny

that there is one nose, one heart and one brain. So, I reason that we are both bilateral and unilateral. We are both many and we are one.



Is this not Christ's message? Is this not the lesson that the apostle Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 12? Paul rightfully states that there is one body. But it is diverse. Paul says there is one single body, but not one single organ. Paul reasons that if there were a single organ, there would be no body. Each organ, each part of the body has unique characteristics and roles. And no one part can say that the other is more important than the rest. Paul says that all parts are equal.

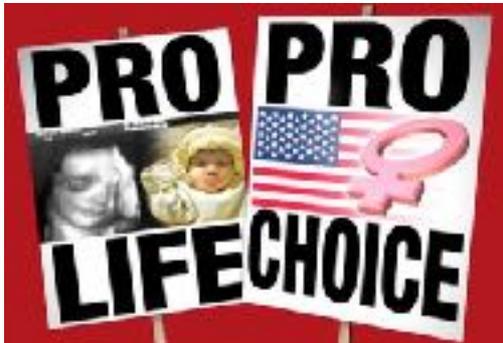


However, just because all parts are equal does not mean all should be treated the same. Those who respond to ‘Black Lives Matter’ with the retort that ‘All Lives Matter’ have not read from Paul who preaches that “those organs of the body which seem to be more frail than the others are indispensable” and therefore can and should receive special treatment (I Corinthians 12:22-23) that moves all closer to equality. For those that question why we as a faith tradition, be it in the United Church of Christ or Centre Congregational Church, speak out at events such as the Homelessness Awareness vigil or during the Martin Luther King Day celebration this past Monday have not read from Paul, “If one organ suffers, they all suffer together. If one flourishes, then all rejoice together” (I Corinthians 12:26).



I believe very strongly that we at Centre Congregational Church make every effort to support and affirm many who are our members and even those who are not. I believe very strongly that we at Centre Congregational Church can model for our community and the world the realm of God; that is, we can provide a glimpse of what the kingdom of

God can look like. And this requires a great deal of non-binary thinking.



In church and society, we can no longer simply be only pro-life or pro-choice. Dart reminds me that we can no longer simply be Republican or Democrat. We must refuse to be categorized and pigeonholed and forced to fight one another. Within the church and society, Stephanie and Gina remind me we must no longer be divided by Catholic or Protestant. We must no longer divided by homosexual and heterosexual; I saw emails this week from Mission & Service that suggest our church is going to be more intentional about welcoming the LBGTIQ A community. We must not be forced to choose from the male and female binary. Heidi suggested we have a transgender bathroom - or otherwise co-ed. Jack reminded me at the space envisioning workshop that we can't simple favor the young against the old. This week, Lisa and Judge Pu remind me that our society is judged not by how powerful or rich we are, but how we most compassionately treat those in our society who are the most vulnerable.

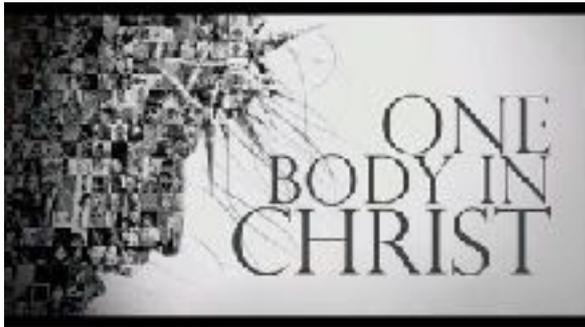


It is in Jesus Christ that we gather here as one body. It is an understanding of that one body that fuels Mission & Service to support efforts in our church, our community and far flung parts of the world. It is the common bond we have in Jesus Christ that drives Christian Education to communicate that faith is best demonstrated in action. It is in our congregational meeting that Bill will chair in a couple weeks that best proclaims to Gina, our new member, that we are a democratic church, an egalitarian church and a church that understands the newest members' thoughts are equal to the chair and the minister's.



Friends, I know we are all different. We have right sides and we have left sides. We are diverse. But, we have one mind and one heart. It is the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ. And if I may extend the

metaphor beyond that which Paul explains: we have one spine, the church, holding both sides together. Old and young, male and female, gay and straight, conservative and liberal, rich and poor, healthy and ill all are one single body - “brought into one body by baptism, in the one Spirit poured out for all of us to drink” (I Corinthians 12:12-13).



This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, the people of God responded, “Amen!”