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I had my gallbladder out a few years ago, and I remember explaining to the boys what this surgery was all about. We are an odd family and happen to have color-coded human anatomy placemats, which came in really handy for describing to them where the gallbladder was and why I had to have it removed. As we were looking at these placemats, one of the boys asked me, “What organ does the gallbladder’s job when it’s gone?” And I said, “The pancreas steps up and does the work that the gallbladder used to do.” “Oh, that’s so nice of the pancreas,” they all agreed. “Yes, it is,” I said, “but the pancreas doesn’t do as good a job as the gallbladder, because that’s not what the pancreas was created to do.” Nonetheless, the boys expressed deep admiration for the pancreas, this heroic organ that would so selflessly do the work of its fallen comrade, the gallbladder, even if its efforts could never measure up to the gallbladder itself.

It's a good illustration for today, as it provides a springboard for our reading from Paul and also because today our congregations each have their annual meetings. Indeed, the metaphor for the day is that of the body...both literally, as in the case of my illustration with the gallbladder and the pancreas, and also figuratively, that is to say, the idea of the church as the body of Christ, that each one of us is a member of the whole body, each one with a particular purpose and a specific function.

Now *this*, I think, is a really fun exercise...imagine, if you will, that this congregation is a body. Each one of you is a different member...What organ are you, in this body? What function do you provide? What purpose do you serve?

Who is the heart of this congregation, the ones that keep this body moving, the ones that provide the rhythm and beat that keep this place

going? Sometimes sluggish and lethargic, sometimes racing and pounding, these are the ones who help this body put one foot in front of the other.

Who are the lungs of this body (I didn't say windbags!)? These are the ones that provide us with breaths of fresh air...these are the ones that refresh us and invigorate us. Are the lungs our little ones, the ones that exercise their lungs regularly with their shrieking and babbling and crying and jabbering? Maybe our little ones are our lungs. This is their body, too, for without them we suffocate and die.

Who are the tongues in this body? Who are the ones that speak for us, that ones that teach our classes and read lessons from the Bible and guide our meetings and lead our times of gathering and worship and Bible study? The tongue has a tricky job, to know when to speak and when to keep silent.

In this body, who are the eyes, the ones that give us focus and clarity and vision? These are the ones who read the news and connect it to God's

action in this world and these are the ones who see the presence of God in this community, in our schools and in the workplace. These are the ones who take notice of the ones who are sad or grieving or absent. They are the ones who perceive the subtleties that many others miss.

In this body, who are the ears, the ones that listen? These are the ones that are oftentimes quiet, drawing little attention to themselves. These are the contemplative ones, the ones who do not speak the reactive word, but are instead conservative in their speech (not in content, but in amount). They listen, they hear, they attend by listening to what is said and unsaid, what is spoken and what is spoken, what is addressed and what is ignored. They are the ones who filter wisdom to the brain.

And just who are the brains of this operation, anyway? Who are the ones that think for us, the ones that ponder, the ones that process and deliberate and reflect? These are the ones who do not sleep when others do,

for their brains will not allow them to. They keep silent vigil by night,  
mulling over God and the mysteries of the universe when they should be  
getting their doctor recommended 6-8 hours.

Who are the hands of this body, the ones that the brains call when  
something breaks? These are the ones that fix and repair and build up and  
tear down. These are the selfless ones that come in after a long day's work to  
attend to a furnace or a leaky roof...these are the ones who mow the grass  
and clean the toilets and bake communion bread and fold our bulletins and  
sprinkle salt on the ice so the rest of us don't fall on other parts of the body  
that will not be mentioned.

In this body, who are our fingers, the ones that make music, the ones  
who play the piano and strum the guitar? These are the fingers that shape the  
kringles we love to eat and drop change into the Noisy Offering buckets.

These are the fingers that slide into bowling balls when we bowl together in

the spring and bait fishing hooks when we fish together in the summer and dial 911 when one of our youth breaks a leg snowboarding in February.

Who are the lips of this body, the ones that sing? Who are the ones that, when they open their mouths, the rest of us fall silent? These are our soloists, our duets, our quartets. These are our choirs, both children and adult. These are the leaders of Holden Evening Prayer. These are the ones that chant, that harmonize, that rehearse so that our worship of God might be elevated to the surreal. Their lips open and song flies out and pierces our hearts with its beauty, and we often cry because of it.

Who are our feet, the ones that get things done? These are our unsung heroes, the ones who mutter to themselves, “Oh, for heaven’s sake, I’ll just do it myself!” (and you know who you are!) These are the behind the scenes members, the ones stuck in socks and hidden from view...these are the ones who grab that bag of trash on their way out, the ones who take that pile of

dirty dish towels home and return them fresh and clean, the ones who visit our homebound members, who faithfully march into the nursing homes and hospitals, the ones who seem to show up, unbidden, whenever something unexpected happens.

And who lies at the belly of this beast, who are the ones in this body who give us laughter? These are the ones who keep us from taking ourselves too seriously...they are the ones that give us an appetite for humor and a zest for life. Without these ones, we become dry and thin and uninteresting and way too churchy.

And do we have an appendix in this body of ours, perhaps more than one? In this body, are there some who feel like they are just here, like they don't know what their job is? Maybe there are some in this body who are like that appendix, wondering what your function is, and maybe you don't know and maybe we don't know and maybe we'll never find out exactly

why you're here....but God knows why you're here, and that's good enough for this body.

And so, finally, just who is the soul of this crazy body? Who is it that keeps us alive, that keeps our parts moving in harmony? Who is it that makes us distinctly who we are—different from any other Lutheran community on the face of the planet? This, of course, is God, who lies at the very center of who we are, the One who helps us make sense of what the eye sees and the ear hears and the brain thinks...the One who fills the lungs with air so that the lips might sing and the tongues might speak...the One who flexes the muscles so that the feet might march and the hands might fix...the One who courses the blood through our veins, so that we might remain alive as his body on this earth and in this town.

Whatever you might happen to be—the eye, the ear, the brain, the whatever—we are glad you're here. If you weren't here, someone else might



step up and fill in your spot, but they wouldn't do as good a job as you would, because God created that spot for you and you for that spot. What part of this body has God created you to be? Ponder this thought.

No member of this body is unimportant, regardless of size or function...Personally speaking, I am not so very fond of my pinkie toe, because it is stubby and small and barely even has a toenail and I just don't understand why it's necessary for the overall functioning of my foot...but if something ever happened to my pinkie toe, even though it seems small and insignificant, my body would never, ever be the same again.