

Good morning!

Now, I'll be honest, I am a little bit conflicted about where to go from here.

Part of me wants to follow up that greeting with, 'welcome back,' as this is welcome back Sunday and all, but I know that greeting implies absence, which doesn't apply to all of you.

So, for those of you who took a break from church attendance this summer, I do say, "Welcome Back! We are so glad you are here this morning!"

For those of you who attended faithfully all summer, to you I say, "Welcome! We are so glad you are here again this morning!"

And to you who came sporadically this summer, I say, "Welcome! We are so glad you also chose to come this morning!"

I hope that even if you were physically gone from this sacred space, that your mind and heart and spirit were still with this community.

As Paul says in today's passage, the church is like the body, which is a common metaphor in the New Testament, the body of Christ.

In today's portion of his letter to the Romans, he explains to the new Christians that we are all different members of the same body.

And that's the thing about the body, is that when parts are separated from each other, it's bad news.

We try to keep all our body parts together.

And as members of the body of Christ, I hope that we are always with each other in some way, because it's not right, not healthy, not faithful for us to be completely separated in mind, body and spirit.

So, even if you weren't with us in your physical body, I hope you stayed connected in mind and spirit.

I do love this time of year, though, as we celebrate being together again, in spirit, in mind, *and* in body.

We're together, in one place, under one roof, able to see each other, connect with each other, hear each other's stories, each other's prayers, listen to each other sing, especially the choir who is also back with us.

Thanks be to God that the members of this body of Christ are reunited, together again, hopefully refreshed and relaxed from the summertime, and ready to continue the work that God calls us to do in our corner of the world.

And in order to do that work, we are all needed, each of us, a different part of the body, with a different function, a different gift, a different role to play, we are all needed to make this place function effectively.

And in order to function, we have to do what we did this morning, which is show up.

Be present in our bodies.

Paul calls us to, 'present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship.'

We've all heard the quotes, "90% of success is just showing up," "half the battle is showing up," these phrases are so ubiquitous that I don't even know who to attribute them to.

But while they're a little cliché, they're true.

There are so many things each of us could have done this morning, but instead you decided to make church a priority, to be here, and that is hugely important.

I have been taking a lot of cycling classes lately and that's a refrain that we often hear from the instructors, the hardest part about exercising or going to church is just getting in the building.

Because there are so many things that could keep us away from this place, and yet despite the competition, the other demands on our time and energy, we assembled.

Thanks be to God that we did, I think it's a minor miracle that we show up here every Sunday morning.

But now that we are here, how are we going to make the most out of our time together?

What are we going to do in order to be the best community we can be, in service to each other, our community and our creator?

We all need to think about the role that we have to play here, in order to make our church function.

If we are each part of the body, I want each of you to think about, what do I have to offer?

Can I assist with Sunday School or volunteer in the nursery?

Can I serve on a committee?

Can I write cards to homebound people?

Can I host coffee hour or bake for coffee hour?

Can I help the Trustees fix things around the property?

Can I sing in the choir or support the music ministry in other ways?

Can I visit people?

Can I volunteer with the Missions Committee at Rosie's Place?

Can I organize a fundraiser, like the flea market?

Can I help the Crafters for a Cause?

Can I work with the Green Team to make our church more environmentally friendly?

Can I help with the Fall Family Faire?

Can I be a collector who counts the money after church?

Can I be a head usher or a lay leader who assists with worship on Sunday morning?

Folks, I could go on.

What's amazing to me is how much we are able to do as a community, but the truth is that it takes a lot of people to make this place run.

And when I say a lot, I mean each and every one of us.

Whether you have a lot of time, or a little time,

whether you want a short-term commitment or a long-term commitment,

whether you are handy or creative or compassionate,

whether you are very physically fit or less mobile,

whether you like spending time with others or would rather be alone,

whether you are available during the day or in the evening,

whether you feel comfortable taking on a leadership role or would rather play a more supportive role,

whether you love details or are more of a big-picture thinker,

whether you've been here for 40 years, 5 years or a few weeks,

whether you are a member or not,

there is some way for you to contribute your gifts to the needs of our church.

The only requirements are that you love our church and you want it to continue to be a place of welcome and belonging, if those are two things that are true for you, then we can find a place for you to make a difference.

As Paul says, we are all members of the body, and we all have a function, none more important than another.

While I was writing this sermon, I couldn't help but wonder why Paul used the metaphor of the body to describe the new church.

Remember, he lived in a time before modern medicine, when bodies were even more fragile than they are now.

I mean, 25% of infants died before age one, 50% of children died before age 10, they didn't have proper sewage, and cities were a breeding ground for all kinds of communicable diseases.

Maybe he was trying to communicate to the early Christians that each of them were needed to get this faith off the ground, and to sustain it, otherwise it could perish just like the mortal body.

The thing about a local congregation, as with a body, is that neither is guaranteed.

Both are fragile.

Neither the church nor a body can be taken for granted.

Both need to be invested in, in order to survive.

There's no guarantee that our bodies will last as long as we want them to, and the same goes for the church.

If we stop giving, or stop doing, or stop showing up, there is no back up.

The wider UCC doesn't have second-string players to send in.

There's no unlimited bank account somewhere that we can tap into if our finances run dry.

We, with the help of God, are all we've got.

While that might sound daunting, I see it as a privilege.

We have to want this place to exist, we have to want it so badly that we make it so.

I think it's a miracle that people for just shy of 300 years have loved this place enough to keep it going, year after year, passing it off from generation to generation.

Now it's our turn to tend it, to care for it, to pour so much love into this church that we feel the love in return,

the community feels the love and the generations after us feel the love,

so that they understand the importance and the value of perpetuating this local church.

I hope that this community helps us see the good in each other, that it gives us the freedom to exercise our gifts, maybe even ones we didn't know we had.

I hope each of you can find a way that works for you to plug in.

And if nothing is coming to mind, please come speak with me, I'd be more than happy to help you discern how you can marry what you have to offer with the needs of our congregation.

Many of you might be familiar with the Hindi word, Namaste, which means that the good in me honors the good in you, the divine in me, honors the divine in you.

Part of our role, as different members of the same body is to honor the good in each other, to name the divine spark that we might not be able to see in ourselves at times.

So, at the beginning of our new program year, I invite you to think about,

what is the good that you want to bring to this congregation, and what is the good that you hope to get from it?

Yes, I am asking you for something, and you might have mixed feelings about that, but to give your time, your energy, your spirit, to your church is actually life-giving.

You get the satisfaction of knowing that you are what makes it possible for us to continue to worship God and serve the wider world.



Being part of a church is like a dance, back and forth, you have to give and receive, for we cannot receive from each other without giving to each other.

So whether you came all summer, part of the summer, or none of the summer, thank you for showing up this morning, it matters that you made it a priority to be here.

And now that you are in this sacred place, I ask you, “How do you want to contribute to our community this year, so that it continues to be a place where we can show up, day after day, year after year?” Amen.

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