

Sermon**27th January 2019****4th Sunday of Epiphany****(Readings were for 3rd Sunday of Epiphany, because Epiphany fell on a Sunday this year:****Nehemiah 8.1-3,5-6,8-10; 1 Corinthians 12.12-31a; Luke 4.14-21)**

So, who is **your** favourite sports person? The BBC Poll for the greatest sporting icon of the 20th century was announced this week, and Muhammed Ali was the winner. Sorry to those who aren't that interested in sport, but anyone who knows **me** well knows I'm a keen spectator of most sports.

So, who is **your** favourite? Andy Murray? Harry Kane? Serena Williams? Lewis Hamilton? Ronnie O'Sullivan? The list, of course, goes on and on. And **they're** just the **current** stars. Maybe your favourite goes back a bit further in **time**, like Muhammed Ali. Is it: Geoff Boycott? Denise Lewis? Daley Thompson? Jessica Ennis-Hill? Or my favourite, Kenny Dalglish!

But then, there are a whole series of **other** stars who must deserve consideration; stars of sport with a particular defining

feature. Stars like: Jonny Peacock; Tanni Grey-Thompson; David Weir; Ellie Simmonds, Hannah Cockcroft and Lauren Steadman (recently seen on *Strictly Come Dancing*). Over recent years I'm sure all of us with an interest in sport have marvelled at the ability of these **Paralympic** athletes. And the defining **feature** of this group, is of course, that they all have some impaired use of some part of their body.

Which leads nicely (well I thought so anyway) into a discussion based on our second reading this morning.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul goes to great lengths to evaluate the many different **parts** of the body. He first of all argues on **behalf** of different body parts, justifying their inclusion as parts of the body. An eye, an ear, a nose are all just as much a part of the body as is a hand.

He then justifies the presence of these body parts further by looking at their function. Without an ear, where would the sense of hearing be? Without a nose, where would the sense of smell be?

And then he goes on to dispel any pre-conceived ideas about a hierarchy of body parts: 'the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this.'

And then, just to show beyond doubt that ideas of hierarchy are to be forgotten, because what is of **greatest** importance, is that all parts of the body work together for the good of the whole, he says: 'there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.'

So, why does Paul go to such lengths to evaluate the **body** in this way? Well, a partial explanation comes right at the start of the passage we heard. The first part of this explanation is again about avoiding a hierarchical view, and stressing the importance of the whole:

'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.'

In other words, a body is a body when all its many members act as **one**, work **together** as one, to the benefit of, or for the good of, the **whole** body.

And why does this matter? Why did it matter to Paul, and why does it matter to us?

Well, 'just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with **Christ**.'

And the explanation, the justification, the importance of this extended metaphor comes towards the end of the passage:

'Now **you** are the body of Christ and individually members of it.'

Paul wrote those words to be read by the early church in Corinth. But his words are equally valid and true today.

Here in the 21st Century Church in Adel, '**You** are the body of Christ and individually members of it.'

Paul then goes on to describe various functions carried out by those individual members of the body of Christ. This is not an exhaustive list, just a set of examples. And we can easily re-write the list to describe the functions necessary in the church, the body of Christ today.

There are many functions necessary for the proper working of a body; there are also many, many functions needed for the proper working of the body of Christ, the church, in the world and in **this** particular place. All the individual members of the body; of the church, have a part to play. And you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. All of you have a part to play.

Which brings me back to my analogy, my metaphor for the body which I started to elaborate with the list of sports people at the start of this sermon.

The great sports stars are those who can harness the whole of their mind and body in order to achieve something outstanding. They have trained, learned and developed their minds and bodies so that all their body parts, the members of their bodies, work together to the benefit of the whole; for the outstanding ability and success of the whole. And **we** are called to do the same as part of that **other** body; the body of Christ.

Now, in that last sentence, you may have noticed that, for the first time today, I used the word '**we**': '**we** are called' to work together. But, as you'll all be aware, this is my last service here in Adel, so after today, so far as **I'm** concerned, the word 'we' becomes redundant. Now it really is 'over to **you**'.

'Now **you are** the body of Christ and individually members of it.'

Over recent weeks I've been very touched by the kind wishes I've received from many people as I approach my retirement. And one of the common comments has been 'we'll **miss** you' or even, slightly more dramatically, 'what are we going to do **without** you?'

Which brings me to the second part of my analogy, my metaphor based on sporting success.

That list of Paralympic stars was defined by some sort of physical impairment in each case. To put it crudely, and completely uncritically, each of these stars is **missing** something; is missing a part of their **body**. In **some** cases it's visually obvious, such as a part of a leg, an arm or a hand. But the **other** common feature among them is that they have overcome, even ignored such loss, and have achieved remarkable success with the body they have.

The body of Christ in **this** place may feel for a time that a small part is missing. But it is a **small part**. The body will go on, will

adapt, will cope and I sincerely hope, go on to ever increasing success in the future.

'God has so arranged the body, ... that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.' And the body, made up of all its individual members can work together to the benefit of, for the **good** of, the **whole body**.

Please do.

Amen.