

PAT ROBERTSON AND MY BIG TOE

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My first year at seminary there was a theology professor who was one of those larger than life people. He would grasp the pulpit with both hands and begin, "Today I intend to preach a sermon entitled" and then we would give us a title that would often leave us wondering where he was going that morning. Well today I intend to preach a sermon entitled "Pat Robertson and my big toe." Now if that doesn't keep you paying attention, I do not know what will.

The message in today's Corinthians passage really smacked me in the face this week. Paul is writing with great power about what is wrong with the church then and now. We as members of the modern church are Corinth written in large letters across the face of the earth. I am just as guilty as the rest and find myself thoroughly convicted by Paul's passage in regards to how I view and treat other parts of the body of Christ.

Paul's image of the community being represented by a body was a standard metaphor in the Greek rhetorical world. Paul however stands the normal metaphor on its head if you will. The standard metaphor was loaded with hierarchical images. Some body parts were more important than others, like the head and the heart. Others were subservient or inferior to the more important parts of the bodies.

Last week Paul made clear that there are a variety of gifts of the Spirit, none are more important than others. Paul this week makes the point that no part of the body is more important than the other, that all parts are dependent upon the other. Eyes and ears are both needed for without one or the other the body is either blind or deaf. Without hands or feet the body's ability to do the work given to it is diminished. Paul speaks of the inferior parts, which are the internal organs, are what we clothe with great honor. This was a revolutionary look at what had been a standard metaphor.

Here is a very personal reflection on Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ. I have some pretty severe osteo-arthritis in my right foot. There is no cartilage left in my big toe. All those years of marching band as a participant and a director have messed my foot up pretty good. Now there are a couple of procedures that the podiatrist can do to repair my toe. One of which is the fuse the toe joint completely. I would eliminate the pain, but that leaves me with a toe that cannot bend. The other is to replace the joint, but even that will only give me relief as long as the artificial joint last which is anywhere from 5-20 years. So I get a cortisone shot once in a while,

take Advil and have given up running, not that my running ability would make much difference to the Holy Terrors.

In short I live with it. There are those days when I completely forget about my arthritis. Yet every once in awhile I step on my foot the wrong way and the pain shoots up my leg and my entire body feels it. But I've learned to live with it. I certainly need my foot; my ministry and my life would be greatly restricted without it. As Paul says, can the hand say to the foot I have no need of you? Of course not.

That brings me to Pat Robertson. If we take Paul's message straight out, Pat is part of the body of Christ. Pat is one of our many brothers and sisters in a large and very messy family. He and his Operation Blessing have done tremendous good work. He has brought Christianity to many even if some of what he teaches makes me cringe, but Paul also says (and this was in last week's passage) no one can call Jesus Lord unless by the power of the Holy Spirit. [1Cor. 12:3](#) Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

So I've decided that when Pat says one of his crazy things on the 700 club it is the equivalent of me stepping on my toe the wrong way and sending pain throughout the body. I may curse, but I must remember that we are all of the same body. Do I wish I didn't have arthritis in my foot? Yes. Do I wish Pat Robertson and others of that type would think before they open their mouths, yes! Does that separate us from sharing the work of Christ, of loving God and Jesus, no!

This of course is much bigger than my personal issues with some in the church. I am pained when theology is used to hurt people. I had a talk with Paul Saley about how we might help with the youth at Seton House. One thing that cut me to the heart was that he said many of the children in Seton House want nothing to do with religion. Many have been deeply hurt physically and emotionally by people claiming to be Christians. My mere presence in a clerical collar can cause some to hide. How does one minister in the name of Christ to a child who has been beaten by a parent spouting bible verses? So I am left, we are left, with how to put a kind loving face on Christianity for these children and the many people like them who have been terribly wounded by parts of the body of which we are members. There is the dilemma I find myself in. This is why my toe hurts every time some well known minister makes a comment that flies through the media.

We can translate that out into our own Anglican Communion as well. I find it interesting that on the various blogs and Internet lists I read that whenever someone suggests just telling the Anglican Communion to take a hike someone almost always quotes this passage. This is a huge challenge for those on all sides. This is a hard lesson about what it means to live as the body of Christ. Like our own bodies there are parts that give us pain, but they are still parts of the body.

On the bright side we had a stellar example of how the Body can come together to do the work of the Gospel. Yesterday in the Parish Hall, people from all the churches in Little Neck gathered to participate in a Stop Hunger Now event. In two shifts with I'm guessing 400+ volunteers we packed almost 74,000 meals. We could have done more, but that was what we had donations for. It was great to watch the wallets open as well as the hearts to do this work. This was a fabulous multigenerational effort. The work resumes this afternoon at 1:30 at Kings Grant Presbyterian.¹

I will have a DVD on in the parish hall after services and I encourage you to watch this. The meals are made up of rice, dehydrated vegetables; a vitamin enriched chicken bullion cube and soy protein. The bag looks like this. Each bag serves 6 and the meals cost 25 cents per serving. The meal provides 60% of the daily vitamin needs of a normal person.

This is how it should be. This is how the Body of Christ should operate all the time. Not just in times of disaster. There's that famous hymn, "We are one in the Spirit" that ends each verse with, " and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

So you see there is a pain pill for my metaphorical foot. It is the antidote that is the love of Christ. And that is what Paul writes about next week.

¹ The total number of meals packed by the churches in Little Neck over the two days was 200,000.