

# The Church: The Body of Christ

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1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Well, it's really good to see you. Let me extend my welcome to you, especially if you're a guest or a visitor who has come to join us since the Remembrance Service. You're very welcome. Thank you for coming to be with us.

Remembrance Sunday is one of those occasions when the whole nation comes together to give thanks for those who gave their lives for our freedom. Differences are put aside as we recognise the sacrifice of others and those selfless acts of love that echo the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which brought the promise of forgiveness and reconciliation over the grip of hate and fear.

In recent years, there does seem to be growing uncertainty and fragility in the world - we all sense it. Consequently, we all need more hope: not just for this life, but for eternity too. And I think we're seeing a tide turning, with people realising that this world is not dependable. We need eternal dependability. If we can look to Christ and realise that death does not have the final say on our lives or in this world, then actually that gives us courage. It gives us courage to pray and to help us face the challenges of our day.

And so, in these troubled times of global anxiety, today's sermon topic - the penultimate in our series on tenets, the things Christians hold on to - is particularly relevant this Remembrance Sunday. God has given us an extraordinary gift to help us cope with uncertainty, and that is the gift of a church family.

You are sat today amongst a remarkable gift, a remarkable blessing from the Lord: people alongside you who care. We care for the community; we care for each other. The church is a caring organisation. And it is a privilege even to be sat here today in relative peace.

The church is one body, united together, as Robert read earlier, with Jesus as our head, the source of our hope. Jesus promised, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." He promised to build his church, and it will grow - it will keep growing throughout the world until Christ comes again. That is a great thing to look forward to.

He is totally committed to growing and sustaining the family of God's people throughout the world.

So, if you are tempted to feel lonely or at risk of being forgotten, put up your hand spiritually and say "no" to that thought. "No - get those fearful thoughts away from me, because I am loved, I am wanted, I am known by God." We are together in Christ in this place, gifted with people who love the Lord and love one another.

Nothing can separate us from his love - no desire, no hardship, disaster, storm, or indeed war. If it ever comes again, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Because together, we can keep it together.

We need one another, and we share that perfect love which casts out fear.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it." The connected global church is an incredible organisation, because it is united by so much more than ideas or activities. If I pull a muscle in one part of my body - and I frequently have - the rest of me suffers with it. If you've experienced pulling a muscle in your leg, your whole body goes out of kilter. That's what it's like in the church: we all feel the pain and suffer alongside our brothers and sisters when things aren't going right. It's a remarkable gift.

But we also rejoice in the hope given to us by the Lord. Just this last week, two of our older church members went to be with the Lord. We are gutted, sad, grieving - and yet we rejoice they are with our heavenly Father.

As the family of God, when one part suffers, the rest rally around in practical ways. We all need each other.

When I'm feeling low - and yes, even I feel low; I'm the vicar, not permanently on a spiritual high - I need others to come alongside me and pray. When I feel anxious or directionless, I value the guidance and prayers of others who remind me, "God is good. Nothing is impossible for him." Then I recover my joy and strength, and in turn I can lift up others.

It's like bicycle pedals: when one is down, the other pushes on, moving us forward.

A few chapters before our reading, Paul says the church has "the mind of Christ". An amazing phrase. As we call upon the Holy Spirit and use the gifts of the Spirit, Paul says the church is able to declare God's wisdom - wisdom the world cannot fathom. Remarkable.

So we need to pray for our spiritual eyes to be opened, fixed upon Jesus together, so we can discern what the Spirit is saying to the church and to the world.

Over the summer, I had time to ponder and pray for our benefice - this church, St Mary Magdalene Langridge, and St Martin's North Stoke. I read many books; some inspirational, some... less so. One thing came through clearly: it is important for us as a church to be reminded of what we stand for.

That led to this series on the tenets of our faith. I've been encouraged to hear how people have wrestled with the Lord and not taken long-held beliefs for granted.

When we returned in September, the PCC - about 23 leaders of the church - met to consider what it means to be a church here at All Saints. After much prayer, we produced a membership and values booklet, which I want to hand out today. I've printed 80 copies - you may need to share. Our wonderful churchwardens will hand them around.

For the rest of this talk, I want to share what it means to be a member of this church and the values we hold dear.

After three years in ministry here, I finally feel confident that I know the “angel” of All Saints - the character, mission, values, and things that have guided this church over the years. What you will read reflects not only our purpose as the body of Christ here, but also God’s priority for his church across the world.

Remember: it was the Holy Spirit’s idea to gather the church at Pentecost. Without the Spirit, we are just a human organisation of do-gooders. With the Spirit, the world is changed.

Let me highlight a few things.

**We are an Anglican church** - part of the Church of England. Its origins were messy, but across 400 years it has brought unity and done great good. It can faff about, yes - I vowed never to be part of it, and here I am! The Lord has a sense of humour. But the Church of England is a great vehicle for mission. Our mission here is to share the life and message of Jesus in Weston, Bath and beyond.

This church has been here for over a thousand years. In Weston-super-Mare, I planted churches from scratch on new estates - very different. But this church carries a legacy. We have a responsibility to hand it on.

We want to work with local organisations to help this area flourish spiritually and practically.

**Our values** echo the great commandments and the great commission. Jesus summarised his teaching in an upward focus (loving God), inward focus (loving one another), and outward focus (loving the world). A balanced church holds all three.

By God’s grace and through the Holy Spirit, we are joyful in worship and prayer. We are united, caring for one another. We are missional, reaching out locally and globally. We are generous - with time, gifts, hospitality. We welcome all ages and all backgrounds. And we believe caring for people takes priority over tasks.

**Our benefice** includes Langridge and North Stoke. We work with WASPS school, Oldfield School (and praise God we have an assembly this Friday!), Bath Spa students, and others. We are connected with the deanery, with New Wine, 24-7 Prayer, and we support twelve mission partners globally.

**Our heritage** includes St Alphege, born in Weston around AD 984 - martyred, faithful, courageous. The church here has existed for over a thousand years. We are part of that story.

**Membership** includes the electoral roll, but we are adding a practical layer: the A-E of membership.

- A | Attend regularly.
- B | Belong to a small group.
- C | Cheerfully give.
- D | Do something - join a team.
- E | Encourage others - invite, share, bless.

Home groups are central to pastoral care.

We have a leadership structure - transparent, accountable, rooted in Scripture. Finance is open and honest. Our basis of faith is summarised in your booklet.

Next year will be a **Year of Blessing**. Going deeper (Holy Spirit ministry), nearer (blessing neighbours), and wider (community outreach, schools work, mental health courses).

We will welcome Charlie and Anita Cleverly for a ministry conference, and Keith Powell for ministry team training.

At the heart of everything are **prayer, safeguarding, and honour**.

Prayer holds us together. Safeguarding protects us - one failure can destroy a church. And honour means treating every part of the body with care.

I end with these words from Romans 12 - among my favourites:

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality.”

If we all did that - wouldn’t it be awesome?

**Let us pray.**

Heavenly Father we pray that today you would help us honour one another above ourselves would you help us keep our zeal for you and our spiritual fervour Lord, would you help us as we serve you, our Lord? Lord, I pray that as a people, as a congregation, as a benefice, we would be joyful in hope. We would be patient in affliction, but faithful in prayer. And so, Lord, help us as we share with people in need. Help us to have your eyes and ears to see and to hear what it is you want us to do. Thank you that you're with us. Thank you that you've been with us today by your Holy Spirit. Thank you for your grace, which is sufficient for us. Thank you that your power is made perfect in our weakness. We thank you above all for the privilege of being part of your body and your family here in this church. Thank you, Lord, for your grace. Amen.