

Sermon for Sunday, August 18—The Deep Life of Overflow
Loving God with all of your body

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We continue this week with our theme “The Deep Life of Overflow.” Over the last couple weeks we have considered loving God with all of our mind and all of our spirit. Today we will consider how we might love God with all of our body.

Have you ever noticed the human tendency to always think first and foremost of our personal self: our body and our needs. But today I want to turn that idea inside out.

To begin, let’s consider a story that has floated around over the last few decades. It is told that a question was posed to the anthropologist Margaret Mead as follows, “What is the first sign of civilization?” She replied that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture is a femur that had been broken and then healed. The theory is that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die because you are unable to run from danger, hunt, and survive. But a healed thigh bone is a sign that someone has taken time to care for the injured.

Now there is no verifiable proof that Dr. Mead actually told this story. But I tell the story anyway because fractures of the femur are nasty. Very painful. They take a long time to heal. It was true for members of very ancient civilizations; it remains true today. Fracture of a thigh bone (a femur) continues to be an extremely serious injury. There’s no denying that to successfully survive and heal from this type of fracture requires assistance from other people: someone who takes time to care for the injured. So whether Dr. Mead told the story or not, it rings true that a sign of civilization is seen when a person (or people) take care of each other.

Each and every one of us is a member of the body of Christ. When one of us is hurting under the best of circumstances others of us step up to lend a hand. One of the things that I appreciate deeply about this congregation is how you all care for one another. You exemplify the idea that Paul promotes in the Corinthians text: that the body of Christ is all of us as a gathering of faithful people. That all have value. And when someone in our congregation is struggling we band together to care for that person.

Now a story from VBS this week. Typically we divide the kids by age: Bigs, Middles, and Littles. (some of the dividing has to do with age, and some of it with number of participants in each group) Well, the bigs were mostly boys and their deep desire was to burn off energy by playing team games like kickball or soccer or softball. The middles were supposed to be doing crafts while the bigs played games. But inevitably the group of game players grew and grew as kids were lured away from crafts to join in. The beautiful part was this: as middle kids came to the edge of the playing field the big kids just opened up and incorporated in the younger students. The circle of participants expanded. It warmed my heart to watch this unfold. The bigs understood without any adult intervention that taking care of others included integrating the middle size kids into the game.

The body of Christ should always be ready to expand and grow. There is ALWAYS room for more. The life of a follower of Jesus is a life called to service for the good of the other. And sometimes the “good of the other” is to make the circle bigger and find room for a late arrival to participate. *(Pause)*

Next let’s take it beyond the individual to what is sometimes called the corporate level. Vasa Congregation as a church is a member of the body of Christ. So is every other Christian congregation, whether in Goodhue County, the United States or elsewhere in the world. Denomination doesn’t matter. All congregations are members of the body of Christ and that’s part of why we pray for surrounding congregations and don’t pay attention to denomination. We are praying for other members of the body of Christ and in doing so we are loving God with all of our being.

One way to think about loving God with all of our body is to consider how our congregation can reach out in love to other members of the body of Christ. We carried out an action of that sort through the Endowment when we awarded money to the Ketekekulo Faith Family Foundation for ongoing construction to their building last Sunday. And as you are well aware this congregation has been supporting Radio & Television Caranavi for many years. In both cases we are supporting other members of the body of Christ so that they in turn can nurture the faith life of the people that live near them. *(Pause)*

There are other ways to think about how we might love God with all of our body. Here are two ideas: First, “The love of God is embodied action. It is important to [remember] that we cannot separate the mind, spirit, and body. We can’t think or feel without

a body. Our body can't move without a mind. The big kids adding the middle kids exemplified embodied action. Making phone calls to offer help to a family with a health challenge is embodied action. Stopping to see a shut-in is embodied action.

Second: "The body is the connective tissue between loving God and loving our neighbor. Our texts this week remind us that love without action for the good of the neighbor is not love at all. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor and we cannot truly love the neighbor, especially our enemies, without the love of God overflowing from our lives."

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. A little later it is written in James 2:14-17 14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

James 2:26 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

We do not justify our selves through our good works: in other words, we do not make ourselves right with God through our works. The actions that we take have nothing to do with securing our place in heaven—far from it! Jesus is the one who justifies us. But when we clothe ourselves with love, allow the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and make a habit of thankfulness we discover that we aren't deeply concerned about ourselves. We find that we are much more concerned about the well-being of others and about how we can share what we have for the benefit of others. This is loving God with our body.

There is always an element of works in the sense that we are called to serve our neighbor through the actions of our hands. When we take action we are demonstrating that we are loving God through the use of our body.

We opened worship today with the passage from Mark 12 that says, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." But we also know that the next line is "love your neighbor as yourself."

Next Sunday we will consider how we might "love our comfortable neighbor." On September 1, the concluding Sunday of this sermon series we will consider how we might "love our uncomfortable neighbor."

Let's take a moment for prayer:

Good and gracious God, help us to love you with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. "O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, of you three things I pray: To see you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly, day by day." Amen

Prayer is by Richard of Chichester. Also incorporated into the song *Day by Day* from Godspell.