

Another capability

Enable bodied

One of the pictures God gives to us of his church is that of a body enabled by all of its parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Every member has God-given capabilities, each with a crucial role to play. We are all differently enabled by God, physically, intellectually, emotionally and by our life's path. Only as all of us are brought together in this way is the church able-bodied.

What a different picture to the one we often live with in practice where we find ourselves making comparisons between ourselves and others, their capabilities and ours, their contribution and what we bring to the life and witness of the church. All of us do this from time to time. Sometimes we feel we have more to bring than others, sometimes it is our feeling of inadequacy that rises to the fore. Our God-given personalities, gifts and stories enable us to make particular contributions, but also disable us from doing what only others can do for us.

What a different way to think of disability in the life of the church. All of us are, at one and the same time, enabled to bring what God wants us to bring and disabled by the things we cannot do. We are both humbled and helped as we properly understand our place in the body of Christ as a whole. We are also better equipped to show God's love to those for whom life is a particular struggle because of age, disability, special educational needs, mental or physical frailty.



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. How does this picture of church as an enabled body challenge the comparisons we make between our contributions and those of others in the church?

Q. In particular, how does it challenge our stereotypes about who is able-bodied and who is disabled?

The body of Christ as the great leveller

Hidden away in the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel, chapter 9 is the story of King David and Mephibosheth, the son of his best friend, Jonathan. It is a picture of how everyone is welcome and meant to find an honoured place in the life of God's people.

READ 2 SAMUEL 9:1-13

David was at the height of his powers as king of Israel. Nevertheless, he wanted to honour any remaining descendants of his friend Jonathan. Only one can be found, Mephibosheth. To get an invite to meet the king was the last thing he would have expected because he couldn't walk. As such, he would have been used to being forgotten about, overlooked and marginalised by those around him.



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. Who do we, however unintentionally, sometimes forget about, overlook and marginalise in our church life? In what ways does this happen?

Q. How do you think this makes others feel?

Honoured, not pitied

It would be easy to think that David treated Mephibosheth so well because he took pity on him. Actually, there is little hint of that in the story. Rather, Mephibosheth was honoured by the king in a number of ways that we can still learn from today in how to be more inclusive of all in our church life.

The king takes a personal interest in Mephibosheth and by doing so demonstrates that he is important, remembered and included. Verse 7 helps us see the particular importance of three things. David is protective of Mephibosheth and doesn't want him to be in a situation where he has cause to fear. We too need to be protective of the vulnerable in church life in ways that are appropriate to their needs. However, David also provides a way for Mephibosheth to be active by

restoring to him the land that belonged to his family so that he can make a living from it. This is a good example of including everyone in such a way that it enables them to grow, develop and reach their potential. Finally, the king positions Mephibosheth in the place of honour in the community by inviting him to eat at his table. That would have been a surprise to many, but it was David's way of actively embodying that, "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour" (1 Corinthians 12:22 and 23). This is always a hallmark of Christian witness that contradicts the ways of the world.


FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. What does it look like in our church life to honour those who are often forgotten and feel excluded in their day-to-day life in society?

Q. How can we protect the most vulnerable in our church and local communities?

Q. How can we care for those who need extra help and support while at the same time enable them to grow, develop and reach their potential?

Q. In what ways can we especially honour and involve those parts of the body which seem to be weaker? In what ways are they indispensable to our church's life and witness?

 **Watch this short clip that challenges us to think about what it means to include everybody in the body of the church of Christ.**



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. What simple things could you do around your church buildings to ensure they are accessible to everyone?

Q. What simple things could you do in your church services to ensure everyone can take part as fully as possible?

Q. How might you offer practical care to individuals or families around your congregation who would benefit from particular expressions of love and support?

POINTERS FOR PRAYER



- Pray for those for whom life is a particular struggle because of age, disability, special educational needs, mental or physical frailty.
- Pray for their families and others who care for them, that they will know the practical support of your local church family.
- Pray that your congregation's life and witness might be experienced as a community of inclusion, protection and provision, in which the weakest are placed in a position of honour.
- Pray that we would learn that those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable in sharing with and showing us the fullness of God and what it means to follow him.