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## **“DISCERNING THE BODY” DURING A PANDEMIC**

- 1 “Your freedom to wave your arm ends precisely at the tip of my nose.”
- 2 I can’t remember where I first heard that maxim, or who said it. But it’s stayed with me through the years. Translated: Every human freedom, even in the freest of societies, is never absolute. There are always constraints, restrictions, limits, on your freedoms. Those constraints have chiefly to do with your neighbour. With the needs of others. With an awareness of The Greater Good of other people in our society.
- 3 I thought of these words, and of those constraints and restrictions, when I read in our local newspaper yesterday of a demonstration planned for the city where I live, Waterloo, Ontario.
- 4 The demonstration was to be called a “Freedom Rally”, and it was planned by its organizers as protest against the constraints and restrictions now familiar in our world-wide pandemic. The wearing of masks. The social distancing. The limits to the size of gatherings. All of these constraints limit our freedom, certainly.
- 5 I am sure those sympathetic to this cause would say. “Nobody is going to tell me what to do! Canada is a free country!” There are similar sentiments among a sizeable minority in the USA. Chiefly, I would guess, among conservative Christians.
- 6 All this brings me to St. Paul and his first letter to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 11: 1 - 34. In these verses, Paul is scolding his Corinthian congregation for their abuses at The Lord’s Supper. These were days when the Bread and Cup were still included within the setting of a kind of weekly Agape Meal, and had not yet been separated out, as they are now, condensed and ritualized into what we recognize today as The Holy Communion.
- 7 The primitive Jesus Movement, in those earliest days, apparently met weekly in members’ homes to gather to feast in a ritual meal that included the Bread and Cup of Jesus’ memorial. And the Corinthians were abusing that meal, some members gorging themselves, and the less fortunate leaving hungry.
- 8 Paul admonishes his hearers, in effect, “That ain’t right! That’s not The Lord’s Supper! You are not discerning the Body! Your selfishness, your disregard of others in this community, is an offense to Jesus!”

9 Important to note here is this: Paul is NOT arguing for proper theological discriminations concerning the Bread and Cup, in his choice of the word “body” here – as Lutherans often want to have it. He’s referring instead to a selfishness in the community that ignores the needs of the neighbour, the Body Politic. Even more precisely: The Body of Christ, the gathered community itself.

10 This single minded devotion to the rights of the individual, of the personal – at the expense of the corporate – is perhaps The Defining Pathology of our age, especially in North America. It has its source, as I have argued before in these postings, in North American idolatrous veneration of free market capitalism, where the chief and only virtue is often individual success and prosperity. Pulling yourself up by the bootstraps. The rugged individual, carving out your personal fortunes by brute willpower, often heedless of the needs of others.

11 In short, not Discerning the body!

12 I’m arguing here that THAT is the spirit behind these calls for “Freedom” from the constraints and restrictions that this current pandemic impose. That the best scientific, medical evidence mandates!

13 When you rebel against those scientific constraints in the name of your personal freedom, you are simply not Discerning the Body.

14 And THAT ain’t humane. Much less Christian.

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