

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Bruton Parish Church
The Rev. John Maxwell Kerr
January 24, 2010

A little over a week ago, a young woman, a student at Hampton University, drove the wrong way through the Hampton Road Bridge Tunnel. Visitors unfamiliar with this motorists' abomination may not realize what an achievement this was.

The rest of us shudder. Let me explain. The Tunnels are in two separated two-lane tubes, one is one way Eastbound, the other is one way Westbound. It is usually very busy and often snarled up, being I-64. This was not the case before the student somehow managed to drive onto the one-way causeway leading to the tunnels. Ignoring the oncoming traffic but not entirely missing it, down the Westbound tunnel she drove, Eastbound, cheerfully on her way to visit a sorority sister.

She told the police officer who arrested her that she had seen all the accidents happening around her but didn't think it could have anything to do with her. That is until she hit someone head-on and her airbag deployed. "Oh," she said.

No-one was killed, thanks be to God, but the student will be charged with DUI, failing to stop at the scene of several accidents and a few thousand other offences. What was she thinking? Was she thinking at all or disconnected from the world of human interaction and responsibility?

The essential thing about driving a car, or a motorcycle, or a bicycle, is that you really do have to be aware of your surroundings. There are certain questions one frequently and necessarily finds oneself asking. "What is the speed limit here?" "Am I going too fast to read the road signs?" "Is that idiot in the SUV in front of me sending a text message or chatting on his cellphone?" "Is that child going to step out from between those two parked cars?" "Am I about to run out of gas in the HRBT?" Good questions – interesting questions. All of these questions would have pleased St Paul, had he been a motorist, (I don't believe he even had a chariot license: Scripture is silent on this

point) because Paul's theology is all about human interconnectedness.

In the passage from I Corinthians we just heard, Paul tells us we are interconnected as part of one body in Christ and that all of us, Jews, Greeks, students of Hampton University, are all equally important members. In fact, Christians seeking to understand the theology of St Paul must grapple with his idea of our interconnectedness with one another in Christ. The Greek word, soma, body, is the word he uses again and again. For instance, in the Letter to the Ephesians, he says "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, soma, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love." (Ephesians 4: 12 -16)

Paul isn't just talking about the members of his Church community, not even the Episcopal Church, as the Body of Christ. He is talking about a wider consequence of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus is the Head of the Church but Christ didn't die to save the Church. He died to save the world and through that saving act, all humankind is always, permanently, infinitely interconnected.

The organizing principle making us Christians one body out of a disparate heap of churches, chapels, communities, cultures, nations and individuals, is Christ. True individuality is grounded solely in the indivisible connectedness of each human being to God.

The great theologian, Wheeler Robinson, is famous for many things but perhaps most of all for a single sentence he wrote which puts us correctly in our place. "The Hebrew idea of the personality is an animated body, and not an incarnated soul." We, you and I do not so much have a body with a soul inside it somehow or other, we are a body and the body simply is the soul in its outward form. This applies to us and to the Body of Christ.

The soul is a sort of organizing principle, a Bauplan, that makes us who we are and connects us to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Each one of us is rather like a civilization with our folk memories, place in history, role in relation to other civilizations. That is why it seems so true when someone dies that we say it is like an entire universe passing away. What God was in Christ, what God redeemed through Christ, is so much more than the person identified by your Social Security number or driver's license, even though we cheaply call these our ID. No, they aren't even the beginning of our identity because they neglect our Christ-connectedness.

And we Christians have a special responsibility which follows from this truth. Paul, again, tells us in the Letter to the Galatians that we are to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6: 2) Responsibility to God entails responsibility to every other human being.

If none of us is an individual in quite the way we thought, nor are we some faceless collective - like the social insects, bees or termites, for instance. We really do exist and know one another as individuals but there is one more Greek word to inflict on you: "horismos". Horismos means boundary, and from that we derive the word horizon. We think the edge of our bodies is our boundary. Our skin, our clothes, the space we always sit in when we come to church. Boundary: that's what separates us from each other, we think, but in the most profound way, Paul wants us to understand that we are totally wrong. Nothing can separate us in Christ Jesus, Paul writes. We are one Body in Christ.

There is no true boundary between us if we really understand what it is to be Christian. Our interconnectedness means that being individuals has nothing to do with being Episcopalians, Christians, Haitians, Americans, Jews, Greeks, male, female, slaves, free. Our true individuality is in our mutual connection to the divine. How many times have we been told this and in how many ways? "Ask not for whom the bells toll, it tolls for thee." Did anyone think this was mere metaphor?

Suppose we, each of us, actually believed the Christian truth about who we are. We would see, streaming down upon us, the individual people we think we are, a golden cord of light. That cord connects us to our risen Lord, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus is not just my Saviour, not just our Lord, he is the Lord and

Redeemer of all that is, ever was, ever shall be. The golden cord is Christ's love for us, all of us.

I find this to be a comforting yet disturbing and powerful image and also the basis of all Christian moral obligation.

Do you see that if we are all interconnected in Christ, that must include that idiotic student from Hampton University, and those she terrified in the HRBT, and the unemployed and hungry, and the people of Haiti, and the bankers on Wall Street and even the clergy of Bruton Parish.

Too much to take in? Prayerful reading of the letters of St Paul is how we Episcopalians recommend that one comes to grasp this enormous truth. Neglect of that reading and that truth is tantamount to driving the wrong way through the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. It's not that it can't be done, we have just seen someone try: it's just very unwise.