

Sunday January 23, 2022 Epiphany 3

One in Christ

I Corinthians 12:12-31 Luke 4:14-21

The parts of the body can be confusing to children and so some songs become games to help in the learning. Of course you might remember singing, “head, shoulders, knees and toes” and speeding it up to get confused. I also remember learning the words for the different body parts in French with the same melody “Tete, epaud, jenoues et pieds”. As adults you might even recall the older gospel song about Ezekiel prophesying to the bones in order that they might live again. The song “Dem Dry Bones” also taught how the bones of the body are connected and why it is important that each part of the body functions both independently and with others too! As adults, we often learn more about our bodies as we grow older because we experience changes as some parts do not cooperate with our living as they did when we were children! We then learn more about the various functions of the body parts as we age and how we might stop disease or problems later on.

The human body according to Psalm 139 is wonderfully made and medical science is still discovering more about the body every day. For we know that in these days when viruses and mutation viruses are attacking immunities of people around the world there is much to be learned, processed and shared all for the purpose of preserving life.

But when we think about what Paul was doing as he wrote the letters to the church in Corinth there must have been some problems occurring with leadership and functioning. In his words to the Corinthian church Paul compares the human body with the church of faith. Basic human anatomy at that time would include what was seen and common—ears, eyes, nose, tongue, hands, feet, arms. They did not know x-rays, or the chemistry of blood or even how the heart pumped blood with oxygen. All they knew was what they saw and when these parts failed there was little recourse to correct the problems. Paul describes the connections between eyes and hearing, or ears to the nose, or eye to hands and head to feet noting that each is dependent on the other to function well. You know what it is like to walk into a dark room—you put your hand on the wall where your memory has stored the location of the light switch. Once the light is on your hand goes away from the wall and your feet move into the room. Each part of our bodies has a specific role to play- whether it is enabling air in, to chew food, or to digest and expel the waste, the body functions as one unit. And this is Paul’s point!

The body functions as one unit so therefore should the church! Each person who believes, has confessed and professed their faith and now are welcomed into fellowship. These spiritual gifts are offered for the betterment of the community and the church benefits through the giving of all the gifts. Problems arise if the one who gives also wants to receive more in return- including authority, clarity, power and prestige. But this is not the way of Christ's church. Paul points out that if one of the parts of the body took control and asks where the other parts would be and what role they would have? parts be and what would the overall purpose be of the body. But like the human body sometimes, when one part is not functioning properly another part is also affected. Just like in the church- when we hear of losses, grieving and pain for one of our church family members- we love them and pray for healing, hope and restoration if possible. And this is also true when there are things to celebrate- when babies are born healthy, when children and youth reach and accomplish goals, or when they experience milestone moments of school and education- elementary or high school and begin further studies. This is the role of the church. And as each member lives and grows older, the church family supports each other into that this is no dissension but will have the same care given and received. This is the church at its best.

I have seen this in the various churches I have served. When a young girl was killed in a car accident many years ago- her Sunday school class supported her brother and the family. When twins were born and one lived and one died, the church family was present at both the burial and baptism. When couples married and were known by their church family Bibles were presented as a gift of hope. And several times when deaths occurred the church family supported the family with food, friendship and grieved together. And when people of different ages have come before the church family, and professed their faith in God, there is a movement of the Spirit which lights up and fires up everyone present to reaffirm their faith. But are we willing to do this –reaffirm faith and respond to serve?

I've often heard while I did that ?? years ago but what are you doing to serve God and his church yet? What part of the body are you now?

Jesus went to synagogue on the Sabbath day. This was his custom—he grew up going to the synagogue on the Sabbath- he was a part of the 'family of faith'. He was known as the Joseph and Mary's son who probably cried in the temple as an infant; played tag with the other boys as a child; listened to the rabbis and the teachers of the law speak for long periods of time. This was where he had his bar mitzvah and learned the Torah. And it is here that Jesus wanted

to hear more. He ate there with people he knew all of his life and he even debated and asked questions to the teachers about the laws.

Things were kind of quiet in the synagogue and so he decided he wanted to do something- he got up and went to the caretaker of the scrolls. On the scroll he was handed was the teachings from Isaiah. Jesus had know what he wanted to say, and preach on that day for he knew what everything had meant. And so he read. After sharing the message, he rolled up the scroll, handed back to the attendant, sat down. Everyone watch him and waited anxiously. He said, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Many were shocked, amazed at what he said. And then they questioned him; how dare he say these things? He is Joseph the carpenter's son! We've seen him grow up and now this??? They grew angry and then he left as they were ready to harm him because of his words. Jesus was able to evade those people from the synagogue and he remained safe.

We know that something new developed from this- the church; a gathering place where people of differing backgrounds gathered to share what they had in common, praise and prayer as stories were told and retold about what Jesus taught and about this death and resurrection.

But as Jesus spoke in the synagogue and those present saw and heard him tell what he was going to do they stopped listening and reacted because they did not know what to do. How different things might have been had the people of the synagogue not chased him!

But in this story we hear Jesus' purpose and because we are the church established in His name, we hear again our purpose:

Following the Spirit's leading and guidance: as anointed as God's followers through baptism and the oil, we are to bring good news to the poor. We are to proclaim release to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. We are to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. IT all sounds so simple! But we know we cannot do it all—we need each other in this church family, and the churches around the world with whom we are praying today—our Christian church family! Yet each church does something amazing—we worship God and offer thanks and praise to Christ our Saviour. What is amazing is that we cannot fully articulate what this means—this being One in Christ. Each church or even community of faith is different because of the people in it at any time and year. This is true of Glenwood Church today than even 3 years ago, 5 or 10 years ago. And it is in God's hands as to what Glenwood Church or any other will be in the future. This is because God's Spirit is alive and working in people hearing these words and music and calling to them and you to Arise- your light in Christ has

come. You are called to get up and do the work in the world that Jesus said he would do. God will make us strong and lead us to offer ourselves in service and praise. Each of us is an important of the church family collectively we can do what God has called his faithful people to do for the last almost 2000 years to do! Be one in Christ and one with each other for the sake of the Gospel of Christ and for all people who need to hear Christ's message of love, hope, faith and peace.

This is what it means to be ONE in Christ. Paul, states that those who "have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ". We promise at baptism to follow the Savior, we witness before God that we are willing to take upon us the name of Christ and we will strive to acquire His divine attributes in our lives. We become new creatures and our love for all people increases naturally as we feel concerns for everyone's welfare and happiness. We see each other as brothers and sisters, as children of God with divine origin, attributes, and potential. We desire to care for each other and bear one another's burdens. This is what it means to be Christian. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

God of love, we praise you and come to you as we seek your presence in our lives and renew our faith in you. Bless us O God as we are One with Christ and one with each other. Amen.