

January 24, 2016 Third of Epiphany

Being One Body 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a

We all know about body parts. The older we get the more they talk to us. We even get to know, the parts we didn't realize we had, until they started aching or acting up. We know all about body parts. The Apostle Paul is painstakingly clear about body parts, too, so, *I don't have to tell you* that an eye does not a body make, or just a foot or only the stomach. Now the stomach certainly seems to think it's the whole meal deal. But we know all that too.

I don't have to tell you about body parts but I do have the privilege of reminding all of us about functioning *as a part of the Body of Christ*.

Now for years my right hip joint had been losing the cartilage and sometimes causing serious joint pain. In response the muscles connected to it started tightening up around the hip restricting motion and certain kinds of pain. For years I could barely get my sock on that foot each morning. I even got used to it because I could still do most other day to day activities. The extent of the growing problem only revealed itself when I tried to do a Yoga class and couldn't get near most of the positions on my right side. Then again it was getting harder and harder to keep standing through a Sunday worship service. And again I hadn't been able to sleep on my right side for years, and I had to wake up to turn over several times a night to minimize the pain. We even bought a new super-soft integrated foal bed. Somehow I was still not joining the dots. The ability of the body to compensate is an amazing thing. When I finally joined the dots I wasn't ready to face the surgery right away. That too changed and just in time.

Now, as everyone knows, the hip is replaced, but I'm still compensating. I still stand with most of my weight on my left foot. And of course my left hip is starting to complain. If I don't wise up soon the left hip will start down the same path to replacement. I no longer need to compensate but the old habit continues.

The body knows how to compensate and is ever so willing to compensate, but it doesn't always know when to stop.

The Body of Christ is good at compensating too. We have been declining for years: Declining in membership, declining in financial support, declining in activities. The only thing that is not declining is the average age of our members. Certainly we are no alone. By any measure the United Church of Canada has been declining for decades. And we all naturally just keep compensating.

The Body of Christ like our human body just picks up the slack, or the shortfall. We adjust the activities, realign the leadership structure, reassign the assets and alter the energy loads. We learn to do more with less. We do everything we can to keep on going, business as usual. But friends, it is time to join the dots. We need to stop just compensating.

We need to change to ensure a healthy future. Our collective compensation centres upon worshipping Sunday morning the way we always have in this huge, expensive building. We have need of some major surgery on the horizon. Building, location, finances, and staffing, all need remedial surgery soon. To put it another way rightsizing is just around the corner.

The Good News is, we have had major medical procedures before. Moves amalgamations, rightsizing have renewed us in the past, and can again.

Application for Today

2016 can be a pre-op year to prepare for the streamlining of our life together. Let's maximize our potential as a fully functioning body in Christ.

Hymn #467 One Bread One Body

The Spirit Is on Us Together. Luke 4: 14-21

Now let's take a trip back to Nazareth, back to the last seconds of our gospel lesson. With our sanctified imagination we are right there, right in the moment...

Jesus rolls up the scroll and we hear **Jesus** say for the very first time

"You've just heard Scripture make history.

It came true just now in this place."

The silence is deafening. Could it be? Is our local boy actually saying?

"I am the chosen one of God.

Is he actually saying he alone is entrusted with fulfilling **God's** promise of healing, restoration and justice?

Can our **Jesus** bring **God's** pardon regardless of what holds us prisoner?

Can our **Jesus** offer us recovery of sight from what blinds us?

Can our **Jesus** restore us to the freedom that truly defines us?"

Has he lost his mind?

We know how hard it can be to accept the very things we hope for.

Now remember we and those around us in the meeting place back then don't know yet, all that you and I know now. They know **Jesus** left town, on a journey to John the Baptist at the Jordan River. It was some sort of religious pilgrimage or spiritual quest, one of those weekend retreats. But they don't know about the huge, spiritual, life-changing experience which encompasses him at his baptism. The **Spirit of God** anoints him, indwells him, and **God** adopts him with a tender love. But then the **Spirit** drives **Jesus** into the wilderness to sort these things out: to be tested and tempered, strengthened and focused for this new revelation, this new relationship with **God**.

They know in part that **Jesus** eventually resurfaces in Galilee, preaching and teaching a new message of a loving, compassionate **God**. In Capernaum, on the borderlands, **Jesus** is still able to access **God's** compassionate presence. There he

continues compassionately performing miracles and wonders, teaching and preaching among both Jews and Gentiles. Everyone praises him.

So now, **Jesus** arrives home a changed man, all aglow with the success of his fledgling ministry. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and still wet behind the ears from his baptism he goes on the Sabbath to recite and speak at the meeting place.

Jesus stands in front of his family and friends, his youth group leaders, Sunday school teachers and all the rest who raised him. **Jesus** unrolls the scroll of the prophet given to him, and selects the passage that explains his religious experience, explains the power and presence of **God** that he feels, and explains the focus of this ministry. He finds the place where it is written and in a loud voice he tells his hometown crowd.

He declares the dawn of a new day, “**the year of God acting in him**”. In the same breath **Jesus** commits himself to sharing stories and coffee at the downtown shelter, attending Bingo night at the local prison, reading newspapers for the elders down at the community centre.

In other words, he claims an identity as one sent “**to bring good news**” *to where the need is; to where the challenges are*. In a sense he claims a life of giving himself away, a life of pouring himself out for others, showing all who follow him how they too can become fountains of **God**’s grace.

We know what he is getting at.

We too have felt the presence as we share **God**’s grace. We have experienced the inner release, to the *more* of **God**’s compassion.

We know that through faith, love and compassion expand to meet the need and the challenge before us.

We also know how hard it can be acting alone on our own.

So today as members of the **Body of Christ** the message is simple and it still pulsing with new life. When we act as **one in Christ**: When we become his **body**,

the whole is so much greater than the sum of the individual parts. Together we can accomplish so much more than we can alone, on our own.

The Application for Today:

When we are one in the Body of Christ:

God's Spirit is working through US.

to show in word and deed,

that this is the time and the opportunity to become whole!"

Hymn #593 Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love