

Sermon “The Power of a Few Words”
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1 Corinthians 12:12-27, 31a

One Body with Many Members

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ³¹But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Luke 4: 14-22
Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

The
14 Then Jesus, filled

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

SERMON "The Power of a Few Words"

Have you ever gone away and returned home, to the place where you grew up? Perhaps you went to college and came home for Christmas or you returned that summer after your freshman year. Or perhaps you got married and moved into your own home and returned home to visit with your spouse. Or perhaps you moved out to pursue your dream or you went into the service. Maybe you went on a mission trip. And when you returned, there were people waiting to talk to you about your time away or your experience and what that meant for you. Homecomings can be a time of sharing, reconnecting, and even seeing how one has grown.

Well, Jesus had left home. We don't know how long he was gone but we know that he had been baptized, spent 40 days in the wilderness and then worked his way back to Nazareth – preaching and teaching along the way. And he was developing a reputation; people were praising him for what they heard him say.

So he's finally back in Nazareth. He is invited to read during the service in his home synagogue. He is handed the scroll of Isaiah. Now we don't know if he asked for the particular scroll, but he obviously knew what he wanted to read. He read from Isaiah, the first two verses of chapter 61.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

Then he sat down.

He had read only 51 words. But they were significant. They conveyed a message of political liberation – release of captives and freedom for the oppressed, a message of personal and physical healing – sight for the blind, and a message for those who struggled economically – good news to the poor and a year of the Lord's favor, referencing a Jubilee year.

This passage from Isaiah was a radical message. In our Bibles, this passage is introduced as "The Good News of Deliverance." Its message is one of deliverance from oppression across political, economic and health constraints. The passage is a message of how the Messiah would bring about the Lord's kingdom. The people of Nazareth would have heard it before. But they would not have heard what Jesus was to say next, with everyone's eyes upon him.

Jesus sat down. Perhaps he even paused to be sure he had everyone's attention. I imagine you could have heard a pin drop as Jesus made a stunning statement. 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Jesus had just declared himself to be the Messiah. And Jesus had given the people his mission statement, the focus of his ministry, his radical agenda for his life and his message.

In that moment, Luke tells us that the people were amazed at the "gracious words that came out of his mouth." Well, as you know, later in the same chapter, the people of Nazareth will question the authority of this man who they had known as a neighborhood kid. But Jesus would later declare himself to be a prophet who would not be recognized in his home town. And the people of Nazareth would run Jesus out of town, threatening to throw him off a cliff.

As you may recall, in John's gospel we are told that Jesus is the "Word" made flesh, God become human - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-2, 14) Well, Jesus' words in the synagogue tell us how Jesus saw his work on earth.

Jesus had delivered a clear message of where his life's mission would go. He would not shy away from politics, economics, or personal health or healing. In his life, he would upset the status quo in all areas of society. His life would be good news for those who struggled or lived on the margins of society.

But, Jesus had help. The Spirit of the Lord was with him. The Spirit had appeared as a dove when Jesus was baptized. The Spirit had led Jesus into the wilderness where he had triumphed over temptation by the evil one. And the power of the Spirit was with him as he returned to Galilee. The Spirit was with Jesus, had been with Jesus all along, and would continue to be with him. Jesus was the Messiah; God become human; led and accompanied by the Spirit.

And the Spirit, that same Spirit was sent by Jesus to his disciples – to his followers then and now. That same Spirit enables his disciples to follow his example and be the Body of Christ on earth. But, and this is a big but, we are not Messiahs. We are not God. We cannot do it all by ourselves. We do it by employing our talents but also working with others.

And Paul's first letter to the Corinthians reminds us that we are all united as the body of Christ; united in the same Spirit. And he reminds us that the different parts of the body perform different functions and are needed to make the body whole. Then he goes on to list different roles that people have in society, and lists them by what he sees as important.

But I would like to continue on with the image of the body, considering how we can use our bodies, our gifts, and our day to day lives to live out Jesus' mission and ministry. As the eyes of Christ, we are called upon to see when another struggles; to notice and consider whether there is something we can do. Perhaps it will involve something simple. Sometimes when I bring my mother to an appointment, a person sees my mother and her walker and then holds a door open for us. And I appreciate that. Or maybe we are called to see something more significant, like seeing the hungry in our midst and deciding how we might best to help them – whether serving food or supporting initiatives that enable persons to get a better job with a living wage or adequate child care.

As the ears of Christ we are called to listen. Sometimes we listen to someone's story, and all we can do is to sit in silence and be present without offering advice. Other times we can hear the story of a person's struggle, perhaps one that comes from a place of being discriminated against because of race, religion, sexual orientation/gender identity, or mental illness. We can choose to learn more rather than close our ears to words that might be difficult to hear,

As the hands and feet of Christ, we can reach out to those that are in need. It may be as simple as shopping for friend who is homebound. Or it may involve walking in a Crop Walk to raise attention and raise money for those who are hungry or standing at a Prayer Vigil or rally or walking with others who are working for justice or peace, or casting our votes based upon Christian convictions of loving and caring for our neighbor.

As Christians, we are called to share in the radical mission and ministry of Jesus which cuts across all areas of life. Just as the Spirit was with Jesus, the Spirit is and will be with us. And we pray that the Spirit will continue to work through the body of Christ, all of us together, in our world so that someday the final words from that chapter in Isaiah read by Jesus will someday become a reality.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:11)