

Morning Meditation – 1 Corinthians

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. For 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. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

You might not know it from the verse above, but the faithful who attended the First Church of Corinth were not exactly a utopia place that embodied these words. If you read all of Paul's letter to people of God trying to follow Jesus in the First Century in the Corinthian community, you would encounter Paul trying to help them sort out all kinds of disagreements and debates. Should we eat meat dedicated to Zeus? Is it okay to bring said Zeus meat picked to the church potluck? Who did the best baptism service? Who had the best spiritual gifts? Who should be first in line at fellowship time to get the best cookies? What about circumcision? Which, I think we all agree, that last question is always a great topic for public discourse. The committee meetings at the Corinthian Congregation must have been chaotic as they debated and disagreed. I wish we had the minutes from those meetings.

We start with the realization that Paul is not affirming what was, he is dreaming of what could be. Paul's premise is that we are all one body. We are all in this together. We are all equals, even in our difference. Two thousand years ago, our ancestors and the first generation of people trying to follow Jesus, struggled for unity in diversity. We in the church today still struggle. We may nod our head at the above words, but we struggle to fully embody, embrace, and live this truth in our lives. There is a tension within and around us.

We may not argue about what is permissible at the potluck, but we do struggle to talk honestly about white privilege. We may not be concerned with who is served first at coffee hour, but we disagree on the language we use to describe the divine, economic gaps between rich and poor, our LGBTQ brothers and sisters pushed to the fringes and treated as less-than human. We may have many members and we may celebrate one baptism, but we don't live our unity in diversity.

Initially, our response is to blame and shame. Usually, the fault for the frailty of body of Christ today is someone else. Conveniently, it is often those people who disagree with you from the other side. If only, those people were not around or in power. Things will be so much better when we are in charge. It is important to note that Paul is writing in a time of Empire. The language of all Empires throughout history is a struggle to both gain power, then to keep and expand power. True in Biblical times and true today. Empires thrive on hierarchy and the promise that if you stay in-line,

you will be rewarded... eventually. Sometime. Maybe in the next life. Paul breaks down the foundation of Empire by saying the categories and classifications that determine, define who is “in” and who is “out” are no more.

Two thousand years ago, Paul is trying to break down barriers between people. Two thousand years later, we still are called to participate in Paul’s barrier bursting projects. Perhaps now more than ever to say that those categories that polarize us need to be dismantled in the name of the One we follow. No longer defined by identity politics, socio-economics, concept of race, gender identity or sexual orientation.

To prayerfully seek unity in diversity was, is, and will be our calling as people of faith. May our words, actions, and movements of our lives be our prayers in action.

Prayer: Barrier-breaking, bridge-building God, connect my heart to those around me, especially those I struggle to love. Help me drink of the One Spirit that infuses and immerses us all. Amen.

Day Two

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would 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. And if the ear would 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. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 1 Corinthians 12:14-17

In Paul’s preaching, he is not content just to give us the thesis that barriers need to be broken down, he wants to give us concrete examples of what this would mean in our lives. Paul dives deep into the metaphor of a body. Unfortunately, we might miss or dismiss Paul’s point here. We might think, “I don’t believe my foot even talks! And it certainly isn’t upset with my hand. Clearly if the foot has a complaint it is against the fitbit I wear on my wrist and how it buzzes me to get more steps every hour!”

Paul is suggesting and saying, just as it is foolish to think of our hand fighting with our pinkie toe, so it is utterly preposterous what we say to each other. Yet, just as the Corinthians who fancied the meat dedicated to Zeus were not keen on giving up that habit, so too we cling to our ways. I constantly hear people dismissing and discounting others. Pause for a moment this morning and consider how we swim in a sea of people saying essentially what Paul is calling foolish. We hear this on the news. We encounter this on our social media feeds. When we talk to friends or neighbors and

we land on the topics of today. I have heard stories of people being pushed to the fringe of a family or even cut off when they share that their created-in-God's image LGBTQ identity or dating someone of another race or religion.

Why do we feel so threatened by diversity and difference? Why do we circle the wagons with people in our tribe? Who, by the way, probably don't agree with you on everything anyway. One possible reason why we want to distance ourselves from those with whom we disagree is we are enculturated into a society where we compare, compete, and criticize. While I love parts of technology, the internet is the place where such comparing, competing and especially anonymous criticism has been taken to a whole new level. We compare our stay-cation photos to those of our neighbors. We compete to show who is the most safe-est in the pandemic, has the most up-to-date data, and the most "woke" of our white privilege. We criticize constantly, we may not even be aware we are doing it.

Such practices are a shield that distance us from those with whom we are more connected than we want to admit/acknowledge. And in some ways maybe a shield from our own internal struggles. While my pinkie toe doesn't really have a beef with my wrist, my mind is really good at identifying my faults and foibles ~ keeping a running daily tally. I have heard it said that the face we turn to ourselves is the face we turn to the world. We cannot be peace and love when we do not let those fruits of the spirit grow in the soil of our own souls. How could the fruits of the spirit be given away to another, when if they are not cultivated within each of us?

I invite you today to be honest about the ways you compare, compete, and criticize. Where does that twinge of jealousy come in when talking to someone? Where does the deep desire to win fuel your life? Where does your tongue want to prove your point, even at the expense of someone else? In what ways does our internal tension manifest in our external words and actions? May these questions help us begin to help you give voice to what is within you with a generative gentleness in these days. Remember, God crafted You in God's image not to berate your brokenness, but with a grace that is generative/grows in honest/heartfelt reflection.

Prayer: Gracious God some of the people who my life is tethered and tied to frustrate me; some of my brothers and sisters seem to have the nuclear codes to set off my emotions. Help my heart be a house for love rather than hate, guide my words to build bridges rather than barriers; help me help my boneheaded self today. Amen.

Day Three

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The 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." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and 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; 1 Corinthians 12:18-23

The only reason we do not open our hearts and minds to other people is that they trigger confusion in us that we don't feel brave enough or sane enough to deal with. Ane Pema Chodron.

Paul reaches a crescendo and climax by saying that we need to protect the parts of the body that are the most vulnerable. Example is my pinkie toe, which always seems to be seeking out the nearest chair leg to have a meeting with while I am walking, causing pain to run the length of my body. Example is my head, which I put a hat on and sunglasses on my eyes when I go outside in the sun during these summer Florida days, lest the rays of sun cause lasting damage to my skin. Or I think about when my children were younger and we constantly held their hand. Or I think about times I have walked someone to a car when his/her legs were unsteady, letting the person lean on me.

Are there other examples that are stirring within you?

As much as we like to think we always practice what Paul is preaching, we need to acknowledge the ways we devalue and dismiss others. Moment of honesty, who have you said, "I have no need of you" to in your life? We have all had friendships end abruptly or a marriage dissolve or a teenager fighting with a parent's rules. We all read story after story after story of the ways our leaders do this to one another. Our history is full of narratives where people have been pushed aside and devalued.

Sunday, July 30th, was the 30th anniversary of passing the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ways we treated God's beloved children who used wheelchairs, canes, crutches, were visually or hearing impaired was and still is disheartening. Often, people who had a disability were not given proper schooling and were pushed aside. Even today, we need to dismantle our discrimination against bodies that don't

conform to what we have defined as “normal”. This is true on so many levels and is the basis for discrimination in so many forms.

What if, God’s ordering, was for us to receive each person as reflecting God’s beautiful creativity? What if, we would start living Paul’s words and stop treating others as dispensable? What if we would honor each other? While it is tempting to opt out, thinking that I can’t pass laws because I am not a member of the government. But I can vote. I might opt out, thinking I alone can’t change systems writ large. But I do have family and friends I can live differently around. I might opt out, thinking these problems have plagued us for too long. But remembering Rep. John Lewis, if not now, when? If not me, who? I am compelled to do what I can, where I can, and pray that you would join me in such prayerful actions and words today.

Prayer: God who fashions and forms us, who colors with all the crayons in box, who loves us into being in such unique ways; help us have a bias toward unity with diversity and embracing Your love of vast variety in the circles of my life today. Amen.

Day Four

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. 1 Corinthians 12:26

The above words are the best mission, purpose, vision, and core value of the church – ever! My heartfelt prayer is that the church would be known for embracing and embodying these words every day. As people of faith we take these words as a living prayer practice ~~ to be open rather than closed off to the wounds and wants as well as the joys and love that are part of life.

Yet, try as we may, it is sometimes easier to distance or dismiss suffering. Or I can find myself getting critical and cynical with the world and others. This is a sort of shield emotionally because honestly pain can cause us to feel uncomfortable.

Encountering another’s hurt can cause us to ache. Instead, we want to rush and race past suffering, rather than lean in to it. I am aware of how I can deflect or distance myself. I am aware of the ways we compete and compare.

In the face of suffering we compete saying, “You think your back hurts....I have to have surgery next week.”

Or we compare our life to someone else's in times of joy. We plaster a smile when hearing about someone else's success. How many of us have uttered the words, "I am so happy for you," through clenched teeth with a tension aching in our shoulders?

While on the surface Paul's words warm our hearts, when we try to put flesh onto living these words we will encounter difficulty on a practical, participation level.

What would it look like to live the above words? In one word, "presence". Being fully present to this moment as much as possible. It isn't easy, especially this present moment. There is much in this moment that doesn't seem all that sacred. Viruses. Racial tension. Devaluing each other. Stifling stress of staying home when we have watched everything possible on Netflix!! Not hugging or singing or worshiping or being present with each other. Here doesn't feel holy.

But here does have opportunity for growth. And at the foundation of our faith is an invitation that today when you hear suffering of a friend ~ listen. When someone shares a moment of joy ~ laugh honestly and whole-hearted-ly. When there is stress and strain that has been simmering from years that we can no longer ignore, be open. Who do you know today whose heart is heavy, can you reach out? Who do you know who is having a birthday or anniversary in the midst of a pandemic, can you call and even dare to sing "Happy Birthday"? Contact a local nursing home and offer to send a handwritten note to 10 residents who have not seen family for months or may not have family.

What would it look like in your life to live these words? I don't mean that rhetorically. Take time today to describe and define ways these words might be embodied in you, in your relationships, in your words and actions. May such an exercise be my prayer for the word.

Prayer: May the above paragraph, O God, be my collaborating prayer with You this day. Amen.

Day Five

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all

interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

You are the body of Christ.

Just as you are. You don't need to do anything differently. You don't need to dress up or brush your teeth or exercise more or stop doing so much or buy that new moisturizer that promises to make you look amazing or get that new shirt or anything.

Just as you are right now reading this.

You are the body of Christ regardless of what boxes you check on the census or how much you pray or if you fast-forward through my sermon while watching online or if you haven't dusted during this pandemic or if you can't answer the final Jeopardy question or what your identity politics say you are supposed to do.

You are the body of Christ. There is no "should" or "ought to" or "have to". As a friend of mine says, "Don't should on your life." You are the body of Christ, not in spite of imperfections, but because of them.

You are the body of Christ. Everyone reading these words whether you are doing so first thing in the morning or last things at night. Whether you agree with me or don't. Whether you are Type A personality or if you tend to be more laid back.

As Christ came created in God's love and shining a light, so can you in all your beautiful, less-than-perfected, shaped by the sacred self. In the prayer service on Facebook (7/30), I talked about Ikigai (生き甲斐, pronounced [ikigai]) is a Japanese concept that means "a reason for being". What got you out of bed, what helps you feel most alive. I believe during this pandemic and the state of the world around us, we need to examine and explore our ikigai for the sake of ourselves, others, and the whole of creation.

You are the body of Christ is what we preach and proclaim at communion. We say, "Take and eat who you are...the body of Christ." Just as Christ embodied God's love, so may we in all our beautifully diverse and different ways.

You are the body of Christ. Go and live that truth today.

Prayer: Holy God, help me live these words every day. Amen.