

January 27, 2013

Scripture Lessons

I Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

Sermon *Our Two Bodies*

When I was going to Seminary, I guess I experienced in my own flesh, St. Paul's description in I Corinthians 12, of the human body. I arrived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in mid June 1983, I was tired after what had been a 3 week trip across the country, and I was just looking forward to just getting settled in to a nice cozy seminary apartment, or so I thought. When I arrived on campus, I found that there had been some sort of mix up in the housing department, and my apartment hadn't been cleaned, or prepared for my arrival. And besides that there weren't very many people on campus yet, so the only person I could get to help me move in was an ancient custodian. He had emphysema on top of everything else, and my apartment was on the second floor, so it was a disaster.

I spent the next week moving in furniture, and moving it from corner to corner, as I had to clean the mold and mildew that had accumulated in the bathroom, and scrub and polish the floors, appliances in the kitchen, scrap, and patch and paint all 5 rooms, ceiling to floor, strip and wax the floors, wash the windows, and polish the woodwork. But as I was thinking back on that very busy week of my life, I couldn't help but laugh when I thought about today's text from St. Paul. Paul must have just finished a week like I encountered in seminary, when he wrote these words. If one member or a part of the body suffers, all parts suffer together. I thought Paul must have been in the same physical condition I was when I took on that neglected seminary apartment. But then he also seemed to share my pleasure in a warm bath or a recovering muscle at the end of the day when he wrote these words. But if one member or part of the body honored, then all of the members rejoice together. I thought Brother Paul you really know what you are talking about, and there were other things in Paul's words that made me laugh. If all were a single organ, Paul wrote, where would the body be. Yes, I thought to myself, where in the world would the body be? Where would my seminary apartment be. What if my whole body were one giant eye? Or a giant foot, or a head, or ear. And when I used this text for bible study in a nursing home, a patient almost fell off her chair when she was laughing about thinking about herself as a giant foot.

And then I imagined what it would be like to scrub a dirty sink, with just my foot, or paint a wall with my eyes, or climb a ladder with my head or patch the holes in my walls, with my ears. The body is not so stupid, Paul says, to think it can function without all of its parts, together. The eye he says can't say to the hand, I don't need you, nor again the head to the feet, the connections that I have made between seminary apartment and Paul's reflections I don't think are facetious at all. I think Paul wanted us to think about the human body not primarily as a metaphor, or as an analogy, but I think he wanted us think about it as a true body. God has arranged the organs in the body, Paul wrote, each of them as he chose. The body is arranged in a particular way and you and I have to work within that arrangement, not stretching ourselves beyond that bodies limitations. Paul also wants us to think about the fact that the members are parts of the bodies are somehow interconnected. We can't naturally isolate the pain or pleasure centers of our body. He wants us to know that the parts of our bodies are not interchangeable. An eye is not a good replacement for a heart, nor is a hand for a foot. He wants us to concentrate that you cannot even rate the relevant importance of various body parts, as if there were some parts of the body that did not depend upon the other parts to function as God arranged the body. Of course Paul tells us this that we don't already know from experience. The members of our body are connected, distinct from one another, although they depend upon each other. We know Paul's description to be true and we find ourselves laughing when it reminds us just how true this is after a long hard day at work. The human body is not the only body that so carefully arranged, as I tried to point out with the boys and girls. We whose bodies are carefully arranged, but parts have been made parts of that other carefully arranged body, and that other body is the church body. And everything we have seen about our own body parts, applies to this church body that we live within every day, day in and day out. We are connected, one to another. We are not interchangeable with other people and third, not one of us is more important than any of the others among us. I hate to say it, but members of the council are any more essential to the body of Christ then are our Sunday School teachers, or members of the choir, and we should never puff ourselves up or down, because of the gifts and responsibilities that each of us is willing to share with the body of Christ which is the church, And so if all the members were members of the council, how would we get everything done? If everybody sang in the choir, who would enjoy the wonderful music? And if everyone was a pastor, who would sit and listen to these amazing profound sermons, every Sunday morning? And it is for the sake of the body called the church, that Paul is that Paul has pointed us to these experiences of our own bodies. There are times when we

can think quite absurdly about this body. Don't forget this is a kind of a living organism. You might talk and act like we could live and function as well without a certain part of the church members. We might decide that Christ's body might be far better off if its members were exact duplicates of ourselves. Wouldn't that be wonderful if we were all duplicates of me? We might even stand in awe because we might think they are superior to other or we might ignore others because we might consider them unneeded by the rest of us. When these things happen the body of Christ is no longer arranged like it was by God. It becomes dysfunctional, it becomes impaired, it comes somewhat diminished from what it was meant to be. So remember then today as we gather together as a church family, to eat, and to meet, and to talk about the future and our dreams, each one of us has been given talents and gifts, by God to be used in cooperation with everybody else in the congregation. There is no sin or shame that one gift is more prominent or visible from other gifts, because every gift is important. Then the shame comes when we have been given these gifts we don't always use them to the betterment of others, and ourselves in the church. And so as we progress into this New Year, I encourage each one of us to be bold enough to share our gifts for the good of the body of Christ. And I want you to try and listen to these words of a wonderful children's song that reminds us of how important it is to share the gifts of God's love with others around us. The song says, Love is something if you give it away because you will end up having more. Love is like a magic penny if you hold it tight, you won't have any, if you lend it or spend it, you will have others so many they will roll all over the floor. So if you give love away, you will end up with more. I invite you to remember this as we share our gifts together. Amen.