

Luke 4:14-21            The Lord's Favor  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a  
January 26, 2025

As we have seen over the last two weeks in this season after Epiphany, the bible offers themes like the passing through waters signaling baptism, or the human institution of marriage, to help us better understand the meaning of our lives. This week we can add another; the idea of the body, primarily the human body;

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though all of its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.”

One can go on for awhile with this metaphor. We associate it with teamwork. There are several illustrations. In the modern world with its divisions of labor; we have engineers, teachers, doctors, farmers, lawyers, plumbers and electricians, masons and people who work in drywall, concrete, and carpentry, musicians and other artisans, and many more. Each performs a necessary function and serves as a part of a greater whole.

In the church we have missionaries, and administrators, scholars, and musicians, pastors, clergy and laity, we have people who take care of the building and people who keep the accounts in order. Every member is a minister. And each plays a crucial role. And we have Protestants and Catholics, Evangelicals and the Main Line, Pentecostals and

Independents. But there is one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism. Aren't you glad I didn't use football as an illustration.

I am sure you have heard about the concept of a symbiotic relationship. It just means living together. When it comes to human relationships, this concept refers to a situation in which people find themselves at odds, yet tied to together in a way that a friendly relationship is necessary for both to flourish. The body is like this, who could guess that an elbow and a kidney would be a part of the same system?

Part of what Paul is calling for is a voluntary cooperation among people who are very different, and who have different understandings of the world, and who make contributions to the greater good very differently. It turns out to be difficult for people generally to put Paul's vision into affect. Certainly, this was the case in the church at Corinth, where apparently they argued about spiritual gifts.

But let us never lose sight of the vision itself. Paul's understanding of that vision is that the idea of the body as a whole with many parts serves only as an illustration. What does it illustrate?

“For we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jew or Greek, slave or free - and we were all given one Spirit to drink.”

We also read from the gospel this morning, in this case from the 4th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Each

one of the gospels presents the story of Jesus a little differently (sometimes more than a little) than the other three. In this case there is a quotation from the 61st chapter of Isaiah that for whatever reason Matthew, Mark, and John, did not include, where Jesus, when he visits his hometown synagogue quotes;

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives, and the recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim *the year of the Lord’s favor.*”

The connection that links these two readings together is the Holy Spirit, because the same Spirit that anointed Jesus to preach to the poor is also poured out on each of us in its own way, to enable us to be a part of the church’s work in the world.

The biblical vision, so central to Paul’s theology is that *God is at work in the world* in a way that rises above the activities of human beings, whether or not they work well together. History is the story people tell over time. We tell it mostly as a political and military history, although more recently some have begun to tell it in terms of everyday life. Human history is accompanied by the divine story, a kind of sacred history, of creation and redemption, reconciliation and exaltation. We have been invited into this story.

The idea that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave or free, or in Galatians also rich or poor, male or female, in Christ, combined with the idea of

the body as a unit with many parts, is a grand vision of how not only Christians might achieve a better life together, and to do so with less fussing and fighting, and maybe to help the world get along with less violence, but also to show forth the actions of God.

The foremost action of God is Jesus, whose birth we celebrate, and whose Epiphany we now observe, and whose life, death, and resurrection are to us salvation. To be in Christ is to be caught up in God’s history.

Of course, Paul does not end there. He suggests, very eloquently a better way, and then writes one of the more well-known texts in all the bible, the “love chapter,” but we will leave that for next week.

The body is a unit. It has many parts, but is one body. *The church is the body of Christ.* It also has many parts, but is a unified whole. It is tasked with the telling of the divine story, the proclamation of the year of the Lord’s favor.

The church nowadays is divided by politics and ideology, we use the words liberal and conservative; by style; we use the words contemporary and traditional; by purpose; we sometimes use the ideas of evangelism and social justice; and by denomination, just to mention the lingering presence of old divisions. One of the characteristics of the world’s life and of the church’s life, is division, brokenness. By the way, the term denomination means, “part,” of a greater whole.

We are each a small part of the divine story. That is an encouraging message. It is also challenging because it speaks also to the parts played by all the others, even when it does not seem possible. It is not humanly possible. In the hands of God it is miraculously possible. That is what, “The Year of the Lord’s Favor means, that we are the body of Christ, with many parts, but a unified whole.

“May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Thus ends the 19th Psalm, which has served as the Call to Worship this morning.

Every time I read the words of this prayer, I feel a little more connected with the people of ancient Israel, and with King David, with whom this poem is associated. I feel also a stronger connection with those of the Christian faith down the millennia who have born witness to their conviction that, as this psalm begins, “the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands,” and that, “the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul . . . making wise the simple . . . giving joy to the heart . . . light to the eyes . . . enduring forever.”

9 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." 10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses,

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

16 It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. 17 For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." [18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" 20 But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

22 What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— 24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

26 and, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.'" 27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand  
by the sea,

only the remnant will be saved.

28 For the Lord will carry out

his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

29 It is just as Isaiah said previously:

“Unless the Lord Almighty

had left us descendants,

we would have become like Sodom,

we would have been like Gomorrah.”

### Israel’s Unbelief

30 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did  
not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a

righteousness that is by faith; 31 but the people of  
Israel, who pursued the law as the way of

righteousness, have not attained their goal. 32 Why  
not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it

were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling  
stone. 33 As it is written:

“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to  
stumble

and a rock that makes them fall,

and the one who believes in him will never be put to  
shame.”

[Back](#)

[Home](#)