

3 Epiphany C - 24, January 2010  
Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21  
The Rev. Marie Butterbaugh

The devastation and chaos surrounding the events of these past weeks in Haiti give many people cause for reflection. People everywhere are moved by the plight of the Haitian people. I am especially moved by a newspaper picture of one Haitian woman. Her face is contorted with grief. Her wail gives voice and bears witness to the pain of her experience. It touches the heart, speaking to the reality of our human condition. It speaks to our common humanity as God's people.

We are one, one body. Many parts, one body. God has made one body. All of us One body. So begins Matthew Murdoch's song *One Body*. Oneness and unity echo throughout today's readings.

Luke's Gospel today emphasizes one of the gospel writer's central themes. God's salvation as promised in the Scriptures. Fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Luke declares Jesus to be the long awaited Messiah foretold by Old Testament Scriptures. He makes known the Good News of God's saving grace. God's salvation freely offered to people of every race, age, gender, ethnic group, and social position. The coming of Jesus is good news for the entire world. In his writings, Luke paints a picture of the church as well. This church is made up of diverse peoples and encompasses all who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

This day, while attending the customary worship service in the synagogue a scroll is offered to Jesus. Jesus is the hometown favorite. People love to laud the return of the hometown person made good. The child who plays ball in the courtyard is grown up. The son of the carpenter learns his trade. But Jesus is learned in scripture as well. Baptized by John in the Jordan with his follower Jesus returns home. It's time to breakout the fattened calf, rejoice! Uncle Fred, Grandma and the neighbors up the way come and join in the festivities.

Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah. People today recognize this passage as coming from Isaiah 61. Isaiah is proclaiming the good news to the exiled and captive people of Israel. Isaiah declares God's promise of salvation. This vision of God's good will for his people is woven throughout the Old Testament. Today

Nehemiah reminds the people of God's law and love. Nehemiah reminds the people of how far they have strayed from keeping God's commandments. They weep. As one, they rededicate themselves again to faithful obedience. Then they rejoice, sharing their good fortune with the poor among them. The joy of the Lord is theirs.

As Jesus reads, he too proclaims God's Good News. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," says Jesus. "God appoints me to bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captive and oppressed, healing to those who suffer in body, mind and spirit." "I announce the year of the Lord's favor, the jubilee of God's forgiveness." With all eyes on him, Jesus rolls up the scroll. Looking at the crowd he boldly announces, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The rubble of destroyed buildings and countless lost lives in Haiti call for prayer and assistance from God's people on a global scale. The tragic events in Haiti serve as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of humanity. Skilled rescue workers search for survivors, while doctors and nurses attend to others. Others bring home bodies for burial. Contractors will help rebuild demolished buildings and repair roadways, while others send donations of clothing, food, medical supplies and money. Each member of the body makes their own special and unique contribution. Each is valuable.

All of us one body. If am a foot, I will need the hand. If I am an ear, I will need the eye. We are one, one body. Many parts, one body. God has made, one body. All of us one body.

The reading from St. Paul's Epistle begins with images of the physical body. Hands, noses biceps and triceps. That even includes those parts we like the least. Those ugly toes no one wants to show off. Paul writes that the weaker and less significant parts of the body are the most necessary. They should be given attention and respect. Each piece of the body is an essential important part of the whole. These parts working in tandem as one are necessary for the body to function as designed.

Continuing to further illustrate his point, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that the eye can't say to a hand, I don't need you. The ear can't say to the nose I don't need you. If so, I think that the world would be filled with curious looking human beings that look a lot like Mr. Potato Head. "Oh look there's Joe's ear, I'd know that ear anywhere. Here comes Aunt Edna's nose, hope I wore the right perfume so she'll know it's me." That's not the way that God designs the human body. Paul tells us that God has designed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior members so that there might be no dissension among the members. Each member caring equally for the other. If one suffers, all suffer; if one is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Paul then proceeds to compare the Church to the well functioning body. St. Paul envisions the Church as a vibrant Spirit-led body, composed of many different members, who play many different roles. Paul envisions a Church made up of individuals with unique talents and gifts.

In the early days of the church, no distinction between clergy and laity is made. Each member assumes their unique role. Each member plays a special part in building up the Body of Christ, creating a harmonious ministry, using the Spirit's gifts. Not boasting about their spiritual gifts. Not demeaning their gifts by comparing them to others. Paul probably did not here

Paul probably did not here "I wish that I could sing like Frank or read as well as Louise." Each person used their unique gifts. Your gift may be teaching or volunteering in the Church office on Monday. You are great at that! Maybe Frank or Louise can't teach, file or make copies of the Sunday bulletin.

Being the body of Christ takes a communal effort. Here at ECR we are participants in the communal nature of our faith. Just watch the teamwork of Holiday Fare. Together a quilt is finished, cookies baked and crafts are sold. Look at the way this family came together in such wonderfully creative way to solve the budget deficit. We laugh at the idea of a drug named Generous, and are moved by the vestry's skit and their sharing. In these events, each draws upon their wealth of talents, while each person assumes their unique role.

We are one, one body. So it is with Christ. Each one has a piece. Each must do their part. Together we will be one body

As Christ's body in the world you and I are called to live out the gospel imperative, the commandment to love God, love neighbor and love self. As the people of God "The Spirit of the Lord," empowers us. We do not go into this world alone. By the power of the Holy Spirit you and I can bring good news to the poor. We can proclaim freedom those held captive. To those oppressed by the burdens of this world. With God's help, working together we can bring his healing touch to our hurting world. You and I can proclaim the good news with our lips and our lives. It is our call. As we live out our Christian call, we can extend our hands in love. You and I can proclaim the love of God.

As the Body of Christ in the world, we must stand united against injustice, intolerance, oppression and discrimination. Through acts of selfless love, we are to proclaim the perfect freedom that comes from serving our brothers and sisters next door, across the street and across the world. This true freedom comes from following him. He calls us to, feeding the hungry, proclaiming his healing word and love to the nations. You and I are to proclaim peace wholeness and unity throughout the world.

In the pain struck image of this Haitian woman, I see the children who are now left orphaned, the men who search the rubble looking for their loved ones are our brothers and sisters calling us to action. This picture serves as a reminder of our interconnectedness. As St Paul writes, "If one member suffers, all suffer." Not all of us can fly to Haiti. God does not expect you or me to save the world. That's God's job. He does expect us to take small steps, to do small things with his love. That is the gospel call. All of us can pray.

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Thanks be to God.

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