

We are the Body

- [Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#)
- [1 Corinthians 12:12-31a](#)
- [Luke 4:14-21](#)
- [Psalm 19](#)

I love Sundays like today when each of the readings overflows with possibility.

Let's start with Nehemiah. This is the only Sunday in the whole of the three year cycle when we hear from Nehemiah and we never hear from the closely linked book of Ezra. I was in seminary before I knew anything about these guys.

After the exile in Babylon, a small number of Jews returned to their homeland. Nehemiah was an official of the king of Persia and when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed and the people were in distress, he got permission from the king to return to Judah as governor of the province and to rebuild the walls. He was able to motivate the people and rebuild the walls in just 52 days - a remarkably short timeframe. He also worked with Ezra to rebuild the national identity of the returning Jews – building them into a recognizable people who took ownership of the rebuilt temple and the city of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah and Ezra did this in two major ways – one of which went with building walls – they focused on how Jews were different , reinstating purity laws such as not marrying non-Jewish people and emphasizing Sabbath-keeping. The other way was to bring the Hebrew scriptures back into the center of the community's life. In today's reading we heard that the people were so excited when the Scriptures were read they were moved to tears. They were rediscovering their identity in the narrative of God's work among God's people.

For the apostle Paul, our identity comes from our membership in the Body of Christ. It is Christ himself who is the head of the body. So we don't need to build real or metaphoric walls – we don't need rules of behavior to guard the boundary - we are gathered by Christ, and find our identity in our participation with one another under the leadership, or headship, of Christ himself.

Within the Body there are many members – organs, cells, synapses, nerves, sinews, muscles – and many more. Each one of us has a special function, a special ministry within the body. Our ministry will may change over time, but each one of us is vital for the whole to function as Christ with flesh on in Los Osos and beyond. God has need of each one of us.

I don't think that God has a plan for our life, as if we were pawns in a game of chess. But I do think that God has made each one of us uniquely who we are and as we seek to serve God and to be transformed by the Holy Spirit moving in our hearts and minds – as we ask how best we can serve, then in the divine economy our gifts and talents, our love and loyalty are put to the greatest use.

Sometimes people think that those who have obvious leadership roles in the church or in the world are more important, but Paul is very clear that every part of the Body is important, and often the ones who we think are the least important are the most important in God's eyes. As we try to live out the reign of God in our community life both within and outside the church, let us pay attention to the ones we think are less important. They may be people who are not as involved with church activities, or those who only come occasionally, those who are unhoused, those who can't carry a tune, those who keep getting ill, those who are more conservative, or those who are elderly... I don't know who you think are

less important in this expression of God's Body – but they are totally beloved in God's sight.

Which is great news, because however insignificant you think you are, however over-looked you feel, you too are a valued member of the Body and your ministry, whatever that is, whether in obvious leadership or a quiet ministry of presence and of prayer is part of what makes St. Benedict's such a vibrant and joyful faith community.

In the Gospel reading we heard Jesus in the synagogue read from the prophet Isaiah, "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."

That was Jesus' calling, and now it is ours. We are the Body of Christ in the world and there are still hundreds of thousands of people who need to know the good news, who need to be released, to recover their sight and to find freedom from oppression. And we are doing it!

Last week one of the warming shelter guests suddenly started ripping his clothes off because he couldn't breathe. Steve Hirahara got him to the Emergency Room where they initially thought he had pneumonia but soon realized he was suffering from congestive heart failure and was close to death when he reached the hospital. Without the warming shelter that night he would probably have died.

The Abundance Shop has kept tons of stuff out of the landfill and provides a safe place for people to stop by and be treated with respect and warmth. This year, it has also donated \$4,400 to other organizations

in the area, in addition to the \$1,600 that comes from the regular church budget.

And your donations through the Rectors Discretionary Fund have helped people to keep their cars running, helped with gas and rent, paid for needed medication, provided overnight accommodation and food for people in crisis and helped our friends in jail.

These are just a few ways that the Body of Christ at St Benedict's has made a difference this year.

Today we will meet over lunch for our annual meeting. Over the last few weeks we have asked you to reflect on our ministry together – what we are doing well and where we need to pay more attention. The headlines from this review seem to be that we are blessed by excellent ministry in local community, and in our life together, but that it stretches us in ways that are not always comfortable.

Being Christ's Body is not always comfortable or easy. It often challenges us to do or be more than we thought we could be. But we have amazing resources. We have the Word of God which inspires and comforts and confronts us. We have the Spirit of God who moves through us bringing new life and new possibility. We have each other – our fellow members in the Body, and above all we have Christ who is the author and completer of our faith and the head of the church.

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.

Amen. “ Eph 3:20