

January 23, 2022 3rd Epiphany, Cathedral Day

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One Body/Un Solo Cuerpo

For seven or eight summers, my sons attended an Episcopal sleepaway camp in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Each year I made the trip twice to drop each child off at his age-appropriate camp. At the end of each camp session, we parents would show up for the closing worship and to take our children home. We would gather in the outdoor chapel, the Shrine of the Transfiguration, and wait. At the appointed hour we would start to hear children's voices: "Oh when the saints, go marching in, Oh when the saints go marching in..."

Led by a counselor on guitar, here would come our kids, clad in brand new St. George's Camp T shirts, tanned, adorned in bug bites and skinned knees, marching through the woods to join us. They would encircle the benches of parents, and the Eucharist service would begin. Every year a boy and a girl shared the Scripture reading, which was always the same passage: "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." And all the way through to, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Durante siete o ocho veranos asistieron mis hijos a un campamento Episcopal en las montañas de Virginia. Al final de cada sesión de campamento llegaba para la misa de clausura y para traer a mi hijo a casa. Esperando en la capilla al aire libre, escuchamos las voces de los niños.

Nuestros hijos entraron del bosque, cantando, llevando camisas nuevas, bronceados, y cubiertos de picaduras de insectos. Y comenzó la eucaristía. Cada año escuchábamos la misma lección: "Las partes del cuerpo son muchas, pero el cuerpo es uno; por muchas que sean las partes, todas forman un solo cuerpo. Así también Cristo." Hasta: "Ustedes son el cuerpo de Cristo y cada uno en su lugar es parte de él."

Year after year our children heard this passage, as the punctuation point to a week of living in community, worshiping daily, climbing mountains together,

swimming together, learning to get along with all sorts, sleeping in primitive dorms with 8 other people and sharing barely functional latrines. What better piece of Scripture could there be to drive home the essential Gospel message that we are all one in Christ, no matter who or where we are?

Un año tras otro escuchaban nuestros hijos este pasaje, el punto final de una semana en que vivieron en una comunidad, orando, subiendo, nadando, durmiendo con ocho personas y compartiendo los baños primitivos. Esta lección reforzó el mensaje del Evangelio, que somos uno en Cristo, quienquiera somos y dondequiera estamos.

Today we celebrate Cathedral Day, as we always do on the Sunday closest to the Conversion of St. Paul on January 25. We often use the readings set for St. Paul, but this year the Corinthians reading seemed especially appropriate for Cathedral Day, as we celebrate our oneness in Christ, the life we lead together, and the ministry we share. There are many members, yet one body. And the Gospel too, where Jesus proclaims his mission in the words of the prophet Isaiah, reminds us to celebrate our own mission as a Cathedral immersed in the Spirit: Love Christ, Serve Others, Welcome All; and to keep that front of mind as we together imagine our future.

Hoy celebramos el día festivo de la catedral, como siempre en el domingo los más cercano a la Conversión de San Pablo el 25 de enero. La lectura de la carta a los Corintios me parece particularmente apropiada hoy, cuando celebramos nuestra unidad en Cristo y nuestra vida y nuestro ministerio compartido. Hay muchos miembros, y un solo cuerpo. En el evangelio declara Jesús su misión, y nosotros celebramos nuestra propia misión: Amar a Cristo, Servir al otros, Dar bienvenida a todos.

Paul takes an ancient image – community as body – and does something revolutionary with it. Every part of the body has worth, he says, no matter what its function is. And every part of the body needs every other part in order to function well. We need to hear this over and over. How often do we fool ourselves into thinking that one person is more important or more valuable or more worthy than another?

We celebrate the rich for their wealth, even when all they've done to obtain it is to outlive their parents. We pay men more than women for the same job. We build

highways through minority neighborhoods because the residents pay less in taxes than their whiter, wealthier neighbors. We dismiss whole demographics as “the homeless” or “Latinos” or “Seniors”, without considering that each demographic is made up of diverse and unique individuals, each of whom is a beloved child of God with a story and a purpose.

To be needed is a basic human desire. We want to know we are useful and valued. We want to know that we matter to someone else and to the community. Paul reminds us that, “The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” This pandemic has taught us something about who is indispensable, and it is often those who are paid the least and given the least honor: nursing assistants, janitors, wait staff, babysitters. As much as I might grumble about the rising cost of living, I support the restaurant workers and garbage collectors who are taking a stand for a living wage: they deserve that dignity.

Según a San Pablo, cada miembro del cuerpo tiene valor. Y cada miembro necesita todos los otros miembros para funcionar. No deberíamos imaginar que una persona tenga más importancia que otra, por riqueza, por género, por raza. Cada uno es hijo amado de Dios con historia y metas. Necesitamos saber que tenemos valor en la comunidad y para otros. La pandemia nos ha enseñado que las enfermeras, las limpiadoras, los meseros, los niños, personas que no ganan suficiente para vivir en dignidad, son indispensables.

The church is a place where all that inequity can be leveled out. Here we can find purpose and meaning, no matter who we are or what stage of life we are in. I can't tell you how many times someone has told me that they don't have any gifts to offer, but it's simply not true. A parishioner recently wrote to say they were about to retire, and they were wondering if St. Paul's had things for seniors to do. They may have been shocked by my answer, which was as follows:

“What kinds of things do you enjoy? Office work, serving homeless people, moving furniture, connecting people, cleaning silver, leading hikes, raising money, helping to plan construction, praying for people, visiting frail seniors, starting a loan fund for court fees, assisting with worship ...?” I haven't heard back from the parishioner: they are probably regretting their question! All of these activities matter, regardless of how menial or minor they might seem; they are ministries that further the mission of the church as a whole: hands, feet, ears, each

is needed for the full functioning of the body, and every member has something to offer.

En la iglesia es cada persona igual. Cada uno puede saber su propósito. Todos tienen dones para servir. Tenemos aquí muchas tareas de todo tipo, y cada tarea tiene valor para avanzar la misión de la iglesia. Las manos, los pies, las orejas, se necesitan todos para la salud del cuerpo.

Years ago I used to visit with a woman who became increasingly incapacitated. She suffered from Lupus for 25 years and the drugs she had to take for that condition made her bones brittle, to the point where they would break if her caregivers rolled her over in bed. She was a woman of great faith, and we would talk about her ministry of prayer. She knew that, even though she couldn't leave her house, couldn't make things, couldn't sing in the choir, couldn't give large sums of money, she could still be a contributing member of the body of Christ by praying for people, and she was grateful for the opportunity to lift up those in our community who were suffering or in need. I was grateful to know that she was offering those prayers.

Who we spend time with tells the world whom and what we value. Jesus hung out with all the wrong people. He thought it was worthwhile to spend time with a non-Jewish woman of dubious reputation; he invited a tax collector, an enemy collaborator to dinner; he healed children and those who were enslaved. The church is called to be a place where all are welcome: "all sorts and conditions of men", as our Anglican prayer has it. A church that sets out to restrict its welcome to those who are deemed worthy is a church that will die, because none of us is worthy of the love that God has for us. There's a phrase that was often heard around the first church that I served as a priest: God doesn't call those who are worthy; God makes worthy those who are called. I still hope some day to be made worthy.

Jesús pasaba tiempo con las personas equivocadas: una mujer sin esposo, un recaudador de impuestos, un esclavo. En la iglesia somos iguales. Una iglesia que excluye a los "sin valor" va a morir, porque nadie merece el amor de Dios: es un regalo gratis. Cada persona tiene valor y nadie puede decir al otro "No te necesito".

En esta comunidad de San Pablo podemos apoyar los grupos de oración y vulnerabilidad, y al hacerlo ayudaremos construir la comunidad de amor que deseó Jesús.

At Morning Prayer the other day our conversation turned to the value of being part of a community, especially a group where you can be vulnerable without fear of judgment or ridicule. Several people had attended the first meeting of the book group discussing Isabel Wilkerson's masterpiece, *Caste*. They commented on how quickly a group of people who didn't all know each other found the capacity to discuss difficult questions about racism and culture.

We talked about getting over the fear that if I ask a question, someone will think I'm stupid. Someone pointed out that there's a very good chance that if you ask a question in a group, several other people will have the same question but aren't brave enough to ask it. Maybe your ministry in that group is to voice the questions that others have. Everyone matters. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you."

Activities like that book study can provide a safe and brave space where we may discover our purpose and grow in our discipleship. Groups like Morning Prayer, Stephen Ministers, and Centering Prayer, EfM and Altar Guild, offer a core of love and compassion, a glue to hold our congregation together in these increasingly divisive and fragmented times. And, to the extent that we encourage and participate in the growth of such groups, we will be furthering our mission and doing our part to create the Beloved Community that Jesus set out to build. Let us pray:

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.