

BECOMING THE BODY

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FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1 Corinthians 12:27-30

Luke 14:15-24

We come here, O God, out of our
separateness. We are different people.

We have different stories, and we come
from different places this morning, some
nearby, some *from all over the country.*
~~on the other side of the~~
~~world.~~

On this day, help us to get beyond our
differences and to know something of our
oneness. And use our experiences this

Thank all for participating -
caring enough about our church
to invest time + resources

Pam Byers - Exec. Committee

Important moment in life of PC(USA)

Coalition - issued a vision of
the PC

grateful for effort + love
it represents - much admiration

a document that invites critique
+ discussion.

includes proposals, assumptions -
we whish many of us will not agree

so let the discussion begin -

^{in life of PC(USA)} - which is new for many
a moment which finds many of
us in disagreement - dissent.

but committed + being supportive
+ faithful to the church we love

- while not abandoning convictions +
commitments + justice + inclusivity
which our church has nurtured in us.

morning in your ongoing project of
reconciling the whole world through Jesus
Christ our Lord. Now, startle us with your
truth and open our hearts and our minds
and our spirits to your word.

Amen.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually
members of it.”

1 Corinthians 12:27 (NSRV)

“Now you are the Body of Christ and individually
members of it.”

That's not my favorite metaphor. I don't know about you, but I'm not at all sure that I want to be the Body of Christ. If I remember correctly, the actual body of Christ wasn't all that comfortable and, as a matter of fact, ended up getting crucified.

Also, to be part of a body means to live with and tolerate and live in some kind of harmony with the other members of the body. and also to work with them, to be in sync, to do my job but to respect and honor and work for the success of the whole enterprise. As Paul put it, "What good is a hand without an eye?"

To be perfectly candid, I don't know about some
of those other members. Groucho Marx used to
say that he wouldn't belong to a club that would
have him as a member. ^{If I'm reading their documents correctly,} I'm not sure they want
to be part of the same body that has me as one
of its members, ^{sometimes} and, frankly, I feel the same way
about them.

“You are the Body of Christ.” It is one of the
great mysteries of the faith.
^{and abiding}

When author and poet Kathleen Norris moved
from New York City to her family's homestead in
Lemmon, South Dakota, she found herself
drawn to the church and thinking, for the first
time in a very long while, about the Christian

faith. Ultimately, she became a member of the Presbyterian congregation in Lemmon. She participates in the life of the congregation, serves as a supply preacher on occasion, and she writes about her experience with grace and integrity. Her books, Dakota and Cloister Walk, are best sellers. So is Amazing Grace, her most recent, in which she reflects on church:

“From the outside, church congregations can look like remarkably contentious places, full of hypocrites who talk about love while fighting each other tooth and nail. This is the reason many people give for avoiding them. On the inside, however, it is a different matter, a matter of

struggling to maintain unity as the body of Christ given the fact that we have precious little uniformity. I have only to look at the congregation I know best, the one I belong to. We are not individuals who have come together because we are like-minded. That is not a church but a political party. We are like most healthy churches, I think, in that we can do pretty well when it comes to loving and serving God, each other, and the world: but God help us if we have to agree about things. I could test our uniformity by suggesting a major remodeling of the sanctuary, or worse, the Holy of holies—the church kitchen. But I value my life too much.”

And then she digs in a little:

The church is like the incarnation itself, a shaky proposition. | It is a human institution, full of ordinary people, sinners like me, who do and say cruel things. | But it is also a divinely inspired institution, full of good purpose, which partakes of a unity far greater than the sum of its parts | That is why it is called the Body of Christ.”

(pp. 272-3).

["You are the body of Christ and individually members of it," St. Paul wrote to the members of the Christian church in Corinth. \

"You are the Body of Christ," he wrote. | That has never been a favorite image of the Church for me. \ I have trouble with it—not because it is not a good metaphor. | In fact, it is a brilliant metaphor. \ The human body is almost a perfect example of the principle of unity in diversity.

Furthermore, everybody can understand, because everybody has a body. \ Everybod' experiences the principle daily—everything works together for the good of the whole. | If something isn't working, nothing much is right.

Reformed
Douglas John Hall, Canadian theologian, in his recent book, Confessing the Faith, argues that the unity of the church is a reflection of the oneness of God and the God-created oneness of the human family. So when the church is divided, something basic is violated. Unity, Hall says, is not incidental, but essential to Christian faith: ecumenism is not a luxury or liberal plot; it is part of the evangelical witness to which we are called. Hall writes:

has produced
a major work
Theology in
N. Am Context
3rd Volume
17

"Christians cannot accept as normal a plethora of institutions and sects, divided and distrustful of one another, claiming to have been formed by the word of

reconciliation. | Such a situation is a
scandal and a travesty. | One is amazed,
reflecting upon our sad divisions that
anyone outside the churches would bother
to take such a religion seriously." (p. 73).

The oneness and unity of Christian people is
part of the way we witness to the truth of the
Gospel. | Even to say that, however, is to know
the irony Hall identifies. | There are, in fact,
thousands of denominations in our country—
many of them claiming an absolute corner on
the truth.

1st Church Ann Arbor

Michael Lindvall, reflecting on the tendency of Christians to discern the truth and then absolutize that truth and then attack everyone who does not discern the same truth in the same way, wants everyone to remember that none of us gets all the truth all the time, understanding that ^{is} part of what it means to be a Protestant.

and that

Cyathuz
Campbell
only God is
God ..

insert
Michael's

I was caught by his advice, ~~probably by his~~
~~World Church Sunday~~. "We Protestants
must learn to be Catholic. Our chief heresy has
always been our temptation to schism, leading
to the old Roman barb that the ultimate
Protestant is one who belongs to a
denomination of his or her own." ("Diversity

P11 It's what Paul Tillich called
the Protestant Principle -
the inherent sense of the
limits of human institutions -
even our religious institutions -

- the willingness to - the necessity
of critical thinking, not only about
institutions + ideas + creeds +
vision statements you don't
agree with, but your own.

- the caution about claims of
certainty -

- the human tendency to embrace
my truth + then propose that it
is absolute ^{the only} truth + then to
~~to~~ conclude that if you don't
see it the way I do, you
don't belong any more.

- the intellectual + theological
modesty which is the first
characteristic of modernism
+ Christological thinking.

~~There is~~

Back to 11

and Disagreement in the Church," The Register:
The Company of Pastors).

There is something about us—about the
Presbyterian-Reformed way of being the
church—that turns to conflict and division as a
way of resolving differences. It is not a pretty
sight.

It reflects, tragically, a similar dynamic at loose
in our society and world. | Nationalism, racial-
ethnic identity and pride, tribalism—threaten all
over the world to tear apart the fabric of the
human community: | in the Sudan, Northern
Ireland, the Balkans—last week, Serbian police
massacred 19 elderly people, mothers, and
children, because they were Albanians.

even as
then forces
pull back
Serbian troops
contaminated
with min. bugs
wanna + children
because they
are

Bomb in
Juma
Market
this AM

Do you want to hear something interesting—
something almost preposterous on the surface
of it? The church is God's alternative to the
world's propensity to divide and contend and
fight along lines of tribe, clan, race, religion.
The church represents God's precious
alternative vision.

x It's even in our
Constitution—
The church is . .

One time, Jesus told a wonderful story to
illustrate. A man gave a dinner party and sent
out invitations, which were accepted all around.
But when the time for the dinner arrives, the
guests started to drop out, offering a variety of
good and not-so-good excuses.

The host is offended. His response is to get
more guests. Not the kind he normally invites to
dinner. Not the kind who were at that moment
sitting at a table, enjoying the hospitality of a
well-to-do and proper man about town. Go out
on the highway and invite to dinner specifically
those who never get invited, specifically those
who are excluded by popular custom and by your own
religion.

This is a very different picture of what God's
kingdom looks like, and it is a radically different
notion of how God's people are related.

Strangers become guests; outsiders become

insiders; all are welcome because, in Jesus

Christ, in God's heart, in God's re-imagined creation, all

are one; all in their magnificent diversity are

one.

In a world organized on the basis of boundaries

and barriers, there are none here. There are no

barriers here. There are no barriers of

genetics, gender, race, physical incapacity; no

barriers of religion or theology or ideology; no

barriers of morality; no barriers of sexual

orientation. All are welcome and the host will

an Episcopal
cathedral full
of homeless
people + Atlanta
CEOs - holding
candles

not be satisfied until all are present and every
seat is filled.

It is a gorgeous picture of God's kingdom and
the essential unity of the human family.

Of all things, scientists are now telling us that
unity, oneness, is the organizing principle for
the universe. Ever since Sir Isaac Newton,
physics has understood the universe to operate
on the basis of predictable, underlying
mathematical rules. You could understand the
universe by taking it apart and looking at its
separate, isolated parts and systems and laws.

But, then someone discovered that the act of
observing an electron causes the electron to
act differently. And, suddenly, we are in a
whole new place. (“We are bound together in an
invisible, unfathomable web of relationships.”)

You have heard or read about the popularized
version—the Butterfly Effect. (“Every time a
butterfly beats its wings, every time a cat yawns
or a baby sneezes, the whole web shifts to
accommodate it. It’s called the Chaos Theory.”)

Barbara Brown Taylor says the Chaos Theory is
what St. Paul meant by the Body of Christ. “. . .
that great mystery of God that binds us together
whether we know it, feel it, like it or not.” (See
Bread of Angels, Deep in Christ’s Bones, pp. 85-
90).

Taylor helped me see something I never
noticed before. I should have, but
I was too busy worrying about all those
other numbers

I learned something this week. I should have

known it all along, because it is simple. I

learned it reading something Barbara Brown

Taylor wrote. St. Paul is not urging you and me

to agree with his metaphor and start to act like

the Body of Christ. We are not being asked to

evaluate the proposal, to try it on conceptually

and see if it fits our experience. We are being

told something—told something about who we

are essentially, whether we understand it or like

it or not. (This truth is beyond our consent or

liking,) Taylor says. You are the Body of Christ.

Jesus Christ has made you his body. The God

who is incarnate in Jesus Christ has a vision for

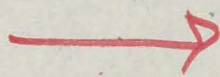
of the body -
when I'm
not sure I
want to be
a body.
Taylor points
it out

truth
is beyond
our own
theological
rational
formulation,
our essential
knots +
confessions

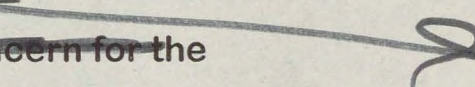
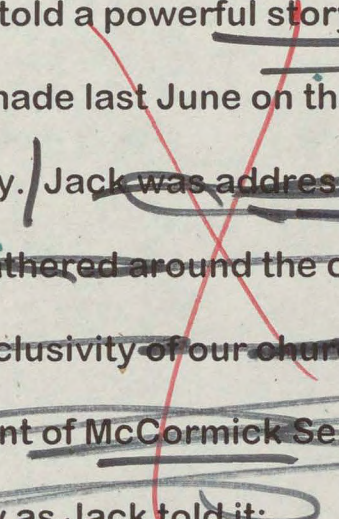
+ vision starts for the future 1
our church.

the human race and you are it—for better or worse.

Is it an illusion, just an idealistic dream? Or is it a description of a truth about us that we keep hidden? Is it a reality which we spend a lot of energy trying to deny?



Jack Stotts told a powerful story about it in a speech he made last June on the topic of unity and diversity. Jack was addressing an audience gathered around the concern for the unity and inclusivity of our church. Jack was the President of McCormick Seminary. Let me tell the story as Jack told it:



at our
luncheon in
Charlottesville

“McCormick Seminary had just relocated to the south side of Chicago to become part of a rich ecumenical cluster of theological schools. (One day Bill Guindon, the president of the Jesuit School of Theology, called me up and said, ‘I’d like to have you participate in an Ash Wednesday service next week. I hope that you’ll impose the ashes with me and the presidents of the other schools.’ Now, I was born in Texas. It seemed a little papish to me. But I agreed. We all took our places in the Lutheran chapel. As the people came forward, we imposed the

ashes: 'From dust you came, to dust you shall return.'

Then a Lutheran layperson got up to speak. He put his manuscript aside and said one sentence: 'How strange it is that we can share the ashes of death but not the bread of life.'"

→ Sometimes the reality breaks through and confronts and compels us in spite of everything we do to deny it. *It did a few weeks ago*

Rockefeller Chapel, when four American churches—Lutheran, Reformed, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterian, with separate

~~Expand - can it happen - can we restore it - can~~
~~we~~ It did yesterday. for many of us - when the
Bread of life.. was broken open for us all day
long - ~~and~~ when finally we received it in sacrament
histories and cultures and vocabularies ^{met} meet at ^{the Baptismal}
the table to declare our unity. (X) ^{font +}

Sometimes it happens gloriously with organ and
trumpets and bright-colored vestments and
graceful liturgy; and sometimes symbolically as
we gather around the table ~~here~~ and
sometimes modestly, in almost invisible ways,
the Body of Christ becomes real. Let me tell
you about one of them.

where we are
the church -

^{the com. I saw}
A good member of this church was dying.
~~explained last Sunday how~~ when I visited him ^{in the hospital}
we discussed the best seller, Tuesdays with
Morrie (conversations between Mitch Albom
and Professor Morrie Schwartz, who was

Mitch Albom - Detroit Free Press

Morrie Professor, Brandeis, ALS -

Tuesdays -

How do you like it - Ok - But what
I'm interested in are the subjects M + M
didn't discuss. I agreed + ~~that~~ ~~surgeons~~

dying). | Glen said he wanted to talk about the
subjects Mitch and Morrie avoided. | We decided
our project would be, "Thursdays with Glen,"
and we talked and corresponded for an all-too-
brief time just before he died.

Near the end, he told me something I will never
forget. | Glen was in a hospice. | His mother and
father and sisters had committed themselves to
be with him all the way, as did other members of
FAC ~~this congregation~~ and a team of caregivers from
a Presbyterian church in Munster. | I asked him
what the most difficult part of the whole
experience was, and he told me that it was in
the evening and his parents had to leave and he
was alone with his pain and weakness and with

the knowledge that he was dying. ("But you know what I do?") he asked. ("I get out my tape player and ear phones and put in a tape of the eleven o'clock service at Fourth Church. I must have a hundred of them. It settles me down. It helps me relax and sleep. Sometimes I fall asleep during the prelude or anthem, and sometimes during your sermon—sorry about that," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "but every night I go to sleep that way—here in bed, but also in my church."

We are God's vision for a divided world. You / we are what God means by unity in diversity.

You are—in ways you may not know—the Body
of Christ.

Amen.