

Sermon May 1, 2016 on the Body of Christ

Reflections on Confirmation, Laundry Love, and Being One Body in Christ

“There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Those words, taken from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, are the words with which we began our Regional Confirmation service yesterday. They begin every service of Baptism. The focus of both Baptism and Confirmation is on the unity of all baptized persons in the Body of Christ.

One body. One Spirit. One Lord, one faith... one God and Father of all...

This past week has been a remarkable one for me. Of course, it is always a blessing to be part of a Regional Confirmation Service! I remember when I was Confirmed in the Episcopal Church in December of 1976. Bishop Frey traced the sign of the cross on my forehead with his big thumb with such pressure that I thought he was trying to make an indentation in my skull. When I got to know him better, I realized that that was *exactly* what he was trying to do.

Now, I had been Confirmed before in the Congregational Church, when I was 13 or 14; but this was different. The Congregational Church was – well, *congregational!* I had little sense whatsoever of our congregation being part of anything larger. I knew that we were somehow part of a denomination, but I saw no indication of that in our church life. I later learned that in The Episcopal Church, the main unit of organization is not the congregation but the diocese, with a Bishop as chief pastor and symbol of unity. The hands that Bishop Frey laid on me – and that Bishop O’Neill laid on many of our own parishioners yesterday – are part of a succession of hand-layings that can be traced back to Jesus’ Disciples! And not only are we part of a Body of Christ that extends back millennia; we are also part of a Body of Christ throughout this whole earth. “There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4:4-6) And over the years, I have learned that when Paul says “all” he means *all*.

The image that Paul uses for this “all” is “the Body of Christ” – but it is *more* than just an image or metaphor. You have heard me say many times that when Paul speaks of the Body of Christ, it is far more real and organic than metaphorical. In my sermon study this past week, I ran across these words from an expert on St. Paul, Dr. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor: “The church differs from all other human groupings in so far as its unity is not functional but organic. Its members are not merely united by a common purpose, but share a common existence. An autonomous Christian is as impossible as an independent arm or leg... To love

and be loved is of the essence of Christianity and is constitutive of the being of the believer. They are bound together by what makes them be what they are.” [Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford University Press: 1998), 288.] We *experienced* that “being bound together” yesterday at the Regional Confirmation service!

But this week has been remarkable for me not just because of the Regional Confirmation – as wonderful as it was! I have experienced the Body of Christ everywhere I have turned this past week.

For instance, I met several different young people this week who are homeless. Some I met at Laundry Love, others dropped by the office. One is living down by the River; another young woman is living in her car. Another young couple is living with a friend in his RV, which has no electricity. She is pregnant; they have a small dog that they care for and that cares for them. Another young couple is making huge strides in putting their lives back together and moving in positive directions.

Through all my encounters with these folk, I had the deep sense that *I* was the one being blessed. I think that several of you who were involved in Laundry Love felt the same. By the generosity of many of you, Christ Church was able to help some our neighbors in some small way, and **we** were blessed in the process. I shared with one young man that I was experiencing first-hand what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians, “If one part [of the Body of Christ] suffers, all suffer together with it; if one part flourishes, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

20th-Century pastor and author A.W. Tozer noted that “Unity in Christ is not something to be achieved; it is something to be recognized.” [A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), *God Tells the Man Who Cares*] It is a **fact** of reality – we are all, together, the Body of Christ, *created* that way by God, as Bishop O’Neill reminded us yesterday. The Spirit-blood that flows through you flows through me and through every living being on this planet. Richard Rohr notes that “we, in our **corporate** wholeness, are the glory of God, the goodness of God, the presence of God. As an individual, I participate in that wholeness, and **that** is *holiness*. That’s the only holiness we’ll ever know. It’s not my private holiness; it’s our connectedness together...”

A week ago yesterday, several of us participated in an Empowered Leadership Workshop, led by the Rev. Canon Lou Blanchard, who will be retiring in June. Lou is the one who leads the Congregational Development Institute that Sally, Debi and I attended for 2 years; and she visits some church in the diocese almost every Sunday, preaching and speaking to the Vestry when asked. Every congregation has been blessed by her ministry over these past 12 years. We are part of the amazing Body of Christ within our diocese - the Episcopal Church in

Colorado. Were it not for our Diocesan Convention last Fall, we would never have heard of the ministry of Laundry Love.

Our youth have also benefited greatly from the offerings of the Episcopal Church in Colorado. Twice a year they attend Quest weekends, and over the past several summers, they have attended summer camp at Cathedral Ridge. We have been invited to participate in Regional youth activities, including Confirmation training, in which both Sarah and Dallas were involved, and a Middle School Mission Trip to Leadville, in which Tammi was involved. We will hear from one of our youth later.

Most of you are aware that there is currently a Capital Funds Drive for the improvement and expansion of Cathedral Ridge. Joe Hattick and Nancy Jones, from St. Michael's in Colorado Springs, spoke with us several months ago about this. Vestry member Skip Pennebaker will be speaking with us later. It is important to remember that Cathedral Ridge is a ministry of the Body of Christ which is the Episcopal Church in Colorado, of which we are constituent and necessary parts. It is *our* ministry – all of us! We have been challenged to raise \$10,000 toward this project over three years, and our Vestry will be deciding soon whether to pledge this or some other amount. The Bishop's goal is that every congregation in the diocese participate in the Capital Campaign, whether or not they decide to pledge the amount that was suggested. Our goal here at Christ Church is the same: that every member participate by making a pledge of *some* amount over a 3-year period – even if it is only a penny a week! The improvements that will be made to Cathedral Ridge will bless everyone – but especially our young folk!

I'd like to finish by reading a part of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians from *The Message Bible*:

“By means of [Christ's] one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which [Christ] has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The way God designed our **bodies** is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part... If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, *and* in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this.” (from 1 Cor: 12)

AMEN