

The Rev. Erin Hensley  
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Proper 16, Year A

### About the Body

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”-Romans 12:1

When we hear this appeal from Paul, we love the idea but tell ourselves it's just that-an idea. After all, we can't live up to what he is suggesting; we certainly can't be holy. One couldn't really be human to do that. Or, if human, one would need to be a monk or a nun to be holy. And if we could present our bodies as a living sacrifice, if we could be holy in that way, would we really want to be? There are already enough suicide bombers in the world. And what's the good in such action? What's the good of giving of oneself? We're tired enough, worried enough, pulled in too many directions already, thank you very much.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we may be worried, we may be exhausted, we may be sinners, but this is not all we are. We can be living sacrifices and still have something left to give, even a life that we love. You see in Christ God has become one with God's creation. God has made the one and perfect sacrifice with his very body for all time for all the world. Jesus sacrificed his body not just on the cross but also in his daily life. He used his ears to listen; his voice to speak and laugh; his hands to welcome the children into the midst of his disciples. Jesus used his hands to wash his disciples feet, his mind to study the scriptures, his heart and mind to follow God's call for his life. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he gave of his body in the resurrection appearances. He stood by the grave and called Mary; he crouched down next to the fire to share an early morning breakfast with his disciples. He willingly showed the scars on his hands and feet.

And now, we are his body in the world. Now, you and I, Christians far and near are asked to be the very eyes, ears, hands and feet of the living God. So do not underestimate the importance of bodies. Breathing, walking, talking, listening, reflecting, crying, laughing, organizing, singing, creating...all the things we can do because we are bodies.

Two parishioners polish the candlesticks so the light dances off them easily. Ladies with eyes for detail and love of the liturgy carefully starch the white linen and arrange flowers. With the offering they present with their very being, they implicitly say to Jesus, “your table is ready.” And when we arrive in this space on Sunday morning, because of what they have done, we see the prepared altar and know Jesus waits for us there. There's something about the body.

The parish kitchen virtually hums on a Sunday afternoon. Two people chop carrots. One person holds the cookie sheet and another pours the batter for the best cornbread in the world. A man opens the oven to check the barbequed chicken. Some cooks even tap their feet to the music playing from the radio. Around 5:30 p.m. they carry food to the buffet line and by 6:00 p.m., more than one hundred people of all ages walk to enjoy this feast prepared by human hands. There's something about the body.

Four parishioners walk through the aisles of a local food bank for nutritious, kid-friendly food. After purchasing items they gather around a table, set out the brown paper bags and place one of everything in each bag. One parishioner delivers these snack packs to a teacher at Highland Park school, where she will place a bag in the backpack of children who otherwise would have no healthy food, or perhaps no food, to eat over the weekend. While the St. John's volunteer leaves the school, she walks past another classroom and sees a friend from St. John's next to a first grader huddled over a good book. There's something about the body.

Teenagers and adult leaders hike the Star Trail on an early Sunday evening. Some youth love soccer; others would rather read. Many who walk this day experience school as a very lonely place. All of these teenagers long to be known and loved as they are. And on this day, they walk together with caring peers and adults. Once at the top of Mill Mountain parents and clergy receive them. Together they stand and pray the Episcopal service of Compline, a simple service of prayers to be said at the end of one's day. There's something about the body.

These stories are not make believe. They are real and true and holy. They speak of joy; they speak of life; they speak of individuals living for something greater than themselves. These stories are about the Church, the body of Christ, here at St. John's. You see, there's no need to go to a monastery, no need to wear a clerical collar, no need to be a doormat to be holy. The need, better yet, the call is for you to do what Jesus would have you do with the particular body you are, for me to do what Jesus would have me do with the particular body I am. The call is for us to do what Jesus would have us do given who we are together. We are not called because we are worthy. We are worthy because we are called.<sup>1</sup> And we are called as a body in these bodies. *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> "We are not called because we are worthy. We are worthy because we are called" is from the Rev. Joseph Hensley, the Assistant to the Rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Durham, NC, and my brother-in-law.