

At Home Worship
January 23, 2022 *3rd Sunday after Epiphany*
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also, with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

God has made us to be different from each other, and has given each of us different kinds of spiritual gifts.

But he has given each of us the same Spirit, and that unites us even in our diversity.

God wants us to be individuals, working together as one church, committed to serve him.

We offer our individuality to the total fellowship; that, united in Christ, we can be the church God wants us to be. Praise be to God!

Lord God, we come together this morning as individuals acting as a single church. Our resources and abilities are limited but, when we work in unity and share the gifts you have given each of us for the good of all, we are capable of performing miracles in your name. In this time together, renew our vision of the Church as your Body, and strengthen our dedication to serve you and you alone. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “Lord, Be Glorified” #2150

In our lives, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In our lives, Lord, be glorified today.
In our homes, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In our homes, Lord, be glorified today.
In your church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In your church, Lord, be glorified today.
In your world, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In your world, Lord, be glorified today.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Holy God, you have created the church to be one body with many members working together under the control of the head, Jesus Christ. Forgive us if we have acted toward anyone as if they did not matter, or as if the church could get along without them. Excuse discrimination that gives more praise to some than they deserve at the expense of others who serve modestly without recognition. Pardon us for the sake of Jesus Christ who forgets no one.

(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. Friends, hear the good news. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

1. Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?
2. Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same? Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare? Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?
4. Will you love the “you” you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?
5. Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you and never be the same. In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show. Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Body Language

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

A bright yellow highway department truck creeps along a quiet, city street. A worker slowly climbs out of the truck and laboriously digs a large hole between the sidewalk and the street. A few minutes later, a second worker gets out, fills in the hole, and tamps down the dirt. A few yards down the street they repeat the same procedure, then again and again.

An elderly lady has been watching. She walks over and asks, "What in the world are you doing?"

One of the workers says, "We're on an urban beautification project."

"Beautification?" she asks with dismay. "What's so beautiful about all those filled-in holes?"

"Well, you see," says the worker, "the man who plants the trees is out sick today."

In a ridiculous way that little story reminds us that different people play different roles. When one person does not do his or her job, there is a hole.

There was an interesting story in the newspapers a while back. The story was datelined Arlington, Texas.

Kenny Rogers of the Texas Rangers baseball team had just pitched the 12th perfect game in modern major league history. It was in the 1990's. The opposing team had no hits, no runs and no one even reached first base. The game featured a diving catch by rookie outfielder Rusty Greer in the ninth inning to preserve this perfect game. Greer, a center fielder, made a sensational catch of Rex Hudler's lead-off line drive in the ninth. "I was going to give it my best effort whether I caught it or not," Greer said. "No matter what, I was going to dive. I got a pretty good jump; dove and it fell in my glove."

Now here's the question I want to ask you? Did the pitcher hurl a perfect game, or was the entire team "particularly Rusty Greer" responsible for that no-hitter? The answer is, of course, that pitcher could not have done it alone.

St. Paul is writing to the church and he says that we are a team. He doesn't compare us to a baseball team but to the human body. Some of us are hands, says St. Paul, some of us are eyes, some of us are toes. BUT ALL OF US ARE IMPORTANT. All of us have a place.

Ralph Daniel is a salesman in Singapore. Ralph moves briskly about on foot and by bus, going from client to client. About a year ago while at home playing and running with his dog, he accidentally hit the small toe on his left foot hard against the corner of a wooden door pillar. The doctor told him to rest the foot and not to wear his left shoe for two weeks. Ralph had to cancel all appointments for 18 days; consequently, he closed no sales and earned no income. He was healthy and fit in every way yet incapacitated by that injured little toe for nearly three weeks. A hurt little toe prevented him from earning income! This experience did teach Ralph to appreciate St. Paul's words about the importance of all of the members of the body whether, they be hands, eyes, or toes.

We are all important in the work of Christ. There are no first or second-class citizens in the Christian community. The hand cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of thee." We are all important whether we are singing in the choir or teaching a class or welcoming visitors or receiving the offering or whatever our role may be. We all matter in the enterprise to which Christ has called us.

Frank Bettger was a star insurance salesman in the period after World War II. Bettger was so successful that he had earned enough by age 40 to retire comfortably. Admirers called him a born salesman. His ability to close a sale was legendary. It is said that he could sell what would be the equivalent of a multimillion-dollar policy in today's dollars in about 15 minutes.

We need to know, however, that at age 29 after one year of selling, Bettger considered himself a hopeless failure. He was not a born salesman. When he discovered that there was only one way he would succeed and that would be to give it everything he had, he was able to begin his journey that led to astounding accomplishments.

So it is with us both in our work in the world and our service in the body of Christ. Just because you have never been comfortable in front of people doesn't mean that you have not been given the gift of speaking or teaching. It is amazing how many of the world's great orators have had to conquer such impediments as a lisp, an unimpressive appearance or some other hindrance. Their very determination to overcome their handicap helped make them great. I am not certain where commitment ends and God's blessing begins, but a spiritual gift is not necessarily a talent. Availability and dependability are as important as ability itself.

The world-renowned contralto, Marian Anderson, was once asked why she always used the first-person plural, we, instead of a simple I when she spoke about herself. Here is what she said:

"Possibly," she said, "because the longer one lives, the more one realizes that there is no particular thing that you can do alone. With the execution of the work that we do there are many people" those who wrote the music, those who made the piano on which the accompanist is playing, the accompanist who lends support to the performances... So, the I in it is very small indeed."

That is also how it is in the church. Each of us is important," regardless of what our area of service might be. This brings us to the second thing that needs to be said: EACH OF US, NEEDS SOMETHING TO DO FOR CHRIST.

We are not only important; we are essential. If our hands take the day off, how shall we eat? If our eyes decide to go on strike, what is to keep us from bumping into things? If our feet decide they've carried an unfair share of the load and resign, how shall we move about? We are part of a team and everyone has something they can do. Unfortunately, not everyone is doing his or her part.

Part of the problem is that there are many who think of themselves as what we might call "Lone Ranger" Christians. These Lone Rangers think they can serve Christ without being part of the team. Robert Hastings has designed a "Do-It-Yourself Worship Kit!" for such people.

"Here's what you'll find in each carefully planned package:

"One portable, lightweight seat, shaped like a church pew. Can be set up anywhere.

"One small, paper covered hymnal containing one dozen well-known hymns (words and music).

"One harmonica," or mouth organ" to take the place of the church organ. (Frankly, you will find it difficult to play and sing at the same time. But you can master it, and after all there must be some challenge.)

"One abbreviated New Testament with familiar selections designed to be read in less than one minute each.

"One small offering plate," to be held in the left hand while putting coin in with the right. (Denomination of the coin is unimportant as you will get it back anyway.)

"One brief sermon entitled 'What a Good Boy Am I.' You will feel much better after using this sermon. It may be read aloud or silently.

"Those who have used our Do-It-Yourself Worship Kit," says Hastings, "tell us they get an extra lift from their own service if at the close, they rush to a mirror and shake hands with themselves. But this is optional."

That is some people's ideal of the Christian faith. Just me, myself and I. But this is far from the biblical ideal. Biblically, to be a follower of Christ is to be part of a family, part of a body, as it were. Community is not optional for the Christian. The Christian community is a reflection of the Jewish community out of which it was born. To be a Jew is to be part of a covenant people" it is to be part of a holy nation. So, it is with those who follow Jesus. We are part of a family. We are members of a royal priesthood. We are hands, and eyes, and toes on a distinct body. Metaphorically, the body of Christ.

We all have something we need to be doing to help the body survive and grow according to the gifts God has given us. Some of us are compassionate listeners. We could be visiting shut-ins. Some of us have outgoing personalities. We could be active in the evangelism work of the church. Some of us work well with little children. The list goes on and on. We have unique gifts and it is important that we use those gifts to serve the body.

It's like a trio that Frank Messenger and his family heard one Sunday in an African church in Zimbabwe. Midway through the service two young men came forward to sing. They were awful! People began to snicker, and began to even laugh out loud. A third young man stood up in the congregation, came forward, and joined in the singing. When the trio filled out they sounded great! They received an enthusiastic response when they finished.

Frank saw this as a parable of balance (or harmony). All the parts of the Body of Christ are needed to make beautiful music. And it is true. Our church cannot be the church that God has called it to be if each of us is not doing our part.

This brings us to a final thing to be said. BECAUSE WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE SUM IS FAR GREATER THAN THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS. That is, the church is not simply another human institution. We are not like the Lion's club or the Kiwanis. They are great organizations but organically they are different from the church. The church relies not only on the commitment of its members. The church relies on the Spirit of the living God. And because the church relies on the Spirit of the Living God, we accomplish far more than human institutions can ever hope for.

There is a story of an ancient king of Babylon who came back to life and visited one of our modern cities. His host showed him the underside of the city: brothels, gambling and drug dens, taverns, and the like. The king was polite but bored. He said, "We had all these in Babylon three thousand years ago, and on the whole, we did it better. Have you nothing new to show me?"

So his guide reversed his field and took his guest to churches, day care centers, libraries, schools, hospitals, public health centers, research laboratories, transient centers, institutions for the disabled, and soup kitchens.

"Ah," said the king, "all this is new. We didn't have these things in Babylon."

No, they didn't have those things in Babylon because they did not have the church of Jesus Christ. I challenge you to go into any non-Christian nation in this world and find the level of ministry to the intellectual, social, physical, and spiritual needs of people that you will find in those countries in which Christians are the majority. Search out the histories of our great universities, our great hospitals, our great benevolent societies and you will find, more often than not, that they were begun in the name of Christ. The church is an institution unlike any other in this world and the reason is that our founder is still with us. It is he who breathes life into his weary followers; it is he who still beckons with the call, "Follow me."

We are Christ's body. All of us are important. There is something each of us can do in His service. Most importantly of all, Christ is alive and he will enhance and multiply whatever we offer in His name.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" #700 VSS. 1,2,4

1. I'm gonna live so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime. I'm gonna live so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime.

2. I'm gonna work so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime. I'm gonna work so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime.

3. I'm gonna sing so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime. I'm gonna sing so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime.

Blessing

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. 2 Timothy 4:22