“ The Head of the Body” 1/26/25

(Ps 19; 1 Cor 12:12-26; Lk 4:14-21) Rev. James Koyama

I want to take my cues from today’s readings to speak about where we are in the new year. As you can see by the availability of the Annual Reports, we are a week away from our Annual Meeting, where we will gather and decide how we want to move forward together.

Our second reading, which is about the “Body of Christ” is helpful preparation, because it reminds us of how the Apostle Paul believed the members of a congregation should interact and what should hold it together. And what should hold us together is the Spirit of Christ, who is the head of the body.

The Head of the Body

This Spirit that unites us as a Body is not something any one can legitimately claim to control or possess. It is something greater than ourselves; a sometimes illusive mystery, that speaks to us from any place in creation it chooses – sometimes from very uncomfortable places. But it is a voice that is always somehow rooted in God’s love for us and desire for our well-being.

Psalm 19 describes this illusive voice in a beautiful and poetic way:

> The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

In other words, all nature speaks of God's doings it is the same voice that Jesus describes to Nicodemus as a wind that blows where and when it chooses, but not as we choose.

And so one of our ongoing tasks as a congregation is to be attentive to what is going on around us and to prayerfully seek a shared understanding of what the Spirit of Christ is saying to us and what it is prompting us to do. This means that there is a certain amount of unpredictability to how we will be led and some adjustments may be necessary that we are not yet aware of.

Body of Christ as our Model

This reading on the Body of Christ is also very helpful, because it provides us with a model for how we should relate to each other as we wait on the movement of the Spirit. It encourages us to think of ourselves, not as separate and self-sufficient islands, but as part of a whole in which different members bring different capabilities

together, and where the abilities of each make up for the inabilities of the others, just as our hands, feet, head and all the organs are essential to the well-being of our own bodies, so are we to the well-being of the congregation.

When we relate to each other this way, no-one needs to feel inadequate or lacking, when it comes to filling a position. And no one needs to fear being hung out to dry as the only person responsible for some area of church life; because in every case it is about sharing the work and making up for each other's weaknesses. Everyone is necessary and their contribution is needed in some way, because a body doesn't have redundancies (except maybe the appendix, but you get the point).

Another important thing that comes through in this reading on the Body of Christ is the importance of respect. Each part of the body is called to honor and respect the important role the other parts play in ensuring the well-being of the whole.

And when we apply this to our situation, it means that the members of the Diaconate, Council, Finance, Property Committee, Tuesday Lunch team, LBS, none are to downplay or disrespect the

contributions of any other. And this applies also on the individual level. Each member of the body needs to be respected as a valuable part of the whole. Not only that, but the reading urges us to be especially respectful of those we are prone to think of as least deserving of our respect.

This is not a minor point, because it is very easy for the members of a group or committee in a church to see its own vision and purpose as overriding the vision and purpose of other parts of the church. And when different parts of the church begin to compete, rather than cooperate with each other, the unity of the body is harmed.

But Paul goes beyond calling for mutual respect when he further adds that, "if one member suffers, we all suffer" and "if one rejoices, we all rejoice." And what this suggests is that at the most basic level, what must hold us together as the Body of Christ is our empathy for each other. It is our capacity to put ourselves in each other's shoes and feel for each other.

And finally, because we are a very financially driven society, it is worth noting that there is no place in this reading or in the Gospel

reading, (which I will touch on next) where money is specifically mentioned. There are other scripture readings that deal with finances, but not here.

And I think that this is because both the reading on the Body of Christ and the Gospel Reading are primarily concerned with our basic motivations and the outcomes we seek. And money should not be what motivates us, nor should it be our goal. Instead, we should see it as a means; one among the many tools we need for achieving our goals.

Centered in Jesus

From the description of how the Spirit moves, it might seem that it is hard to know what our goals should be. But today's Gospel reading help us to see that, while the "how" may seem illusive and hard to pin down, our purpose and goal should be clear. I say this because you could think of today's Gospel as Jesus's "mission statement". And as a mission statement, it gives us clear directions about the outcomes Jesus has in mind for his own ministry. And if we who are his body are his earthly representatives, then his mission and purpose should be ours by extension.

Jesus has left the wilderness behind. He has received the Baptism that marks him as the one chosen to represent God's will, and now he is beginning his ministry by worshipping with the people in his hometown synagogue.

And the first thing he does, is state his purpose; And these are his words in Luke's version:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

These words from Jesus's mouth tell us why he came to dwell among us. And what they do is express a clear desire to bring healing where there is suffering. He has come to bring healing to others and to bring it in a way that will liberate them from all that keeps them from appreciating and living in God's blessing.

When he mentions bringing "good news to the poor," he means such straightforward things as providing food for hungry mouths. But this also includes, as Matthew's Beatitudes suggest, providing spiritual food for those who may have plenty to eat and yet are spiritually poor.

When he says he has come to proclaim "release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for those who are oppressed" he wants to literally free people who are unjustly held captive by others or are being given a raw deal and are being exploited in society.

But he also wants to set us free **us** from the suspicions, the fears and delusions that drive us apart and that threaten the unity we share as members of his body.

This basic desire to bring healing is at the heart of why Jesus came to dwell among us. And so, because we are his earthly representatives, I think that this same desire should also be the ambition that motivates us as a church, when we meet next week to set our priorities for year.

The question of how we do it involves discernment and prayer and listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But the general direction is clear. And we will share the ongoing adventure of how we get there together, next week.