

# The Third Sunday of the Epiphany

## Year C

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección  
Mount Vernon, WA  
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Paul this week talks of “one body”, apparently, a popular metaphor of his time. The contemporary theologian Noel Paul Stookey puts it this way: “We are all in this together, each of us recognizing what this is slightly differently. But with a uniform and central moral calling to be righteous.” The First Nations Version states, “This makes it clear that Creator's purpose is to keep the body of the Chosen One from division. It shows each of us how much we need each other. ... So then, together you all form the body of the Chosen One, and each one of you has a place in that body.” Sitting here we have all answered some sort of nudging, longing, scary word, call. “...we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” We prayed earlier: “Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works”

Jesus comes to Nazareth, fresh from his baptism by John, and testing in the wilderness. In his first reported public act, Luke has Jesus reading and teaching in his hometown congregation, the newly graduated seminarian, still moist behind the ears, being put on display by/for the home crowd. Jesus is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and, full of the Spirit, proclaims his, and our, mission statement:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and release to the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18)

This is the one and whose proclamation we have been called to and reaffirm in our Baptismal Covenant, believing that just as Jesus was empowered by the Spirit in his baptism, so to are we gifted and empowered in our baptism and proclamation. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1Cor. 12:7)

Paul speaks a lot about gifts in his writings and those that are attributed to him. At Corinth, he is concerned that the different gifts are being used to stratify and fracture the congregation as earthly temptations of power and privilege come into play. Some gifts being seen as flashier and more important than others. No one gets all the gifts, and all gifts are necessary for the life and mission of the community.

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. (1Cor. 12:18-20)

Paul never gives the same list twice, Ephesians 4, for instance, speaks of those who would equip the people for their ministry:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity (Eph 4:11)

Last week, we heard a list similar to today's list, but not quite, and are addressed to the community as a whole in different ways.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. (1Cor12:4)

We have all answered a call to be part of this community, and from my experience of call and acceptance, it can be more than disorienting. Very few of us have had a dove descend upon us or been stuck from a horse and blinded for three days. I know my call was closer to a chronic itch, that I tried many ways to scratch, until someone walked up to me and asked, "Have you thought of being a deacon?" No, I was happy being a nurse and ministering that way. No sudden flash, no "strange warm feeling," just the increase in the irritation of the itch. Then came the 2X4 to the back of the head. Visiting my sister living in Colorado, we went to visit a neighbor we had known in childhood. I hadn't seen her in 30 years, and as I got out of the car her first words were, "Are you ordained yet?" This is when the answer becomes, yes, God.

What gifts I have been given, have been nurtured by the health care system and the church, primarily by this congregation. I have a hard time identifying them, except the gift of presence. I know there are others, but I recognize that the spirit is more involved in them than anything I recognize. It has been God and the community calling out gifts and talents when needed. Bp Mariann Budde summed up how I feel in the New York Times: “I’m saying, this is the best that I can do to understand and interpret what I believe our teachings and our scriptures and what the Holy Spirit might be wanting us to hear.” We all need to grant each other grace, as we are all very human.

Bp Budde reminded all of us in her sermon last Tuesday:

Alexander Solzhenitsyn once astutely observed that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, not between classes, nor between political parties, but right through every human heart—through all human hearts. And the more we realize this, the more room we have within ourselves for humility and openness to one another across our differences, because in fact, we are more like one another than we realize. And we need each other. (Sermon 01/21/2025 National Cathedral)

So where do you hear that soft, small voice, whispering in the silence, calling, whispering, maybe even nagging as we continue in this liminal time in the life of this country and these congregations? “I want you to set your hearts on the chief gifts, the ones that will bring the greatest blessing to the sacred family. Now I will show you the most beautiful path of all.” (1Cor12:31)

There will be many events that will directly impact each of us. We are going to need each other, and we have all the gifts and talents available to meet whatever comes. We all have to be ready to say, “Yes, God!”

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