

Let us pray: God, unless you fill these words with Your Spirit, they are just words.

Unless You fill us with Your Spirit, we are just people.

But with You, we become church. May the Church hear You speak today. Amen.

Jesus was a teacher. He was known as rabbi, rabboni, which means teacher. The role of a religious teacher in Jesus' time was to analyze the Scriptures to tease out interpretations that might have meaning. That meant posing questions of the text, talking about previous interpretations of that passage, setting one interpretation off against another, maybe even coming up with one of your own. It did not mean closing the book – or, in Jesus' case, rolling up the scroll, sitting down and saying, “No further interpretation needed, folks. We've arrived. This scripture has been fulfilled today, in your hearing. I'm the anointed one.” “You want to understand the scriptures? You want to get to know God better? Get to know me.”

The teacher made himself the lesson.

This was unprecedented. It was audacious.

It may even have sounded nutty to some.

But perhaps the most outrageous thing Jesus said was that five-letter word:

Today. “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Today these promises have been fulfilled in our hearing.

In one sense, that is the “correct” interpretation of any piece of Scripture.

The promises of God are already revealed; it is up to us to help make them

fully known. In fact, all of God's promises have been fulfilled today,

because they have been fulfilled in Christ, and their power is available to us

through his Holy Spirit. That “Today” encompasses every day,

the eternal present in which God lives and works.

We are invited as people of faith to live fully in Today as the day God is working.

Yesterday is gone; tomorrow may contain any number of blessings and woes.

Now is the time in which we live, and we live in now with God.

It is human nature to lament what has gone before,

or to put it on a pedestal of “What should be – what we already had...”

And it is human nature to fear what is ahead, or to put all our energy into

anticipating something that may or may not happen, imaging scenarios.

It takes faith to live in Today, to stay in the Now.

It takes faith to proclaim, in the face of injustice,
that the promise of justice has been fulfilled;
to believe, in the face of brutality, that evil has been vanquished;
to claim, in the face of hunger, that enough has been provided;
to declare, in the face of death, that life is ours forever.

Yet that is what it means to live by faith –
to live in the “already” future life of God that is all around us,
and becomes more accessible the more we believe and proclaim it.

And we don’t have to exercise this faith alone.

The Spirit of the Lord that was upon Jesus is now upon us as people who live
this side of the Resurrection, and this side of Pentecost.

God doesn’t call us to anything that God does not equip us to do and stay with us
in the doing. We experience that “with us” is through the Holy Spirit.

And we exercise this faith together – in fact, we have to; few of us have
sufficient faith all by ourselves to believe in what we cannot yet see.

Few of us have sufficient strength to call the “not yet” into being.

But we are not alone – as Paul wrote so beautifully, we are connected, one Body.

When one part is weak, the whole is diminished.

When one part is joyful, the whole is lifted up. We move together.

And when we are conscious of being connected to each other,
the depth of community can change our lives.

The way we become more consciously the Body of Christ is by knowing each
other as well as we know ourselves; being open with each other about
what’s going on in our lives – where we need healing, where we need growth.

It happens as we tell our stories to each other, as we feel comfortable to cry –
or to laugh in church, because we are at home in our Body.

Our vitality as the Christ Churches isn’t based only on how well we love each other.

That’s easy. Our vitality as the Body of Christ rests on how well
we love the stranger, the strange, the estranged.

That is the overarching feature of Christ’s Body –

on the Cross it was broken in love for the sake of the world.

That’s why we pause in communion at the Breaking of the Bread –

because it is in the Body broken that we were given life.

And it is in this Body broken that the world is given life through Christ.

When we come together, we are reuniting His body in love.
When we disperse, we are once more broken in love for the sake of the world.
Sometimes that breaking is a real pain, as we take on the world's burdens,
or as we experience the pain that love can cause.
That's why we bring our brokenness back here where we are "re-membered."

Paul went from talking about the Body and the gifts of each member,
to talking about the greatest gift: Love.
Jesus said, "Love one another, that the world will know you are my disciples."
When we feed, when we speak words of hope, when we pray, when we give –
we are living out Jesus' anointing: we are proclaiming freedom and release.
His Kingdom has come on earth, and yet His kingdom is still coming.

For some reason God has ordained that we participate in Christ's work of
freedom. If it were not so, Jesus wouldn't have bothered training disciples
and leaving them instructions, which they handed down to us.
He could have done it all himself – but he didn't. He wants us.
And then we are called to go out into the world as that Body – not as a collection
of individuals, but as one community. We are ONE body with many members.
We gather here, we get filled with Christ's power, we go and live His mission.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring
good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

That's what our bishop was inviting us all to do in her sermon appealing for unity,
to bring that good news,
to make that freedom real with compassion and love and yes, mercy.
In a real, and perhaps scary way, when we hear these words, we the Body of
Christ on earth today, might also say, "Today this is fulfilled in our hearing."
Together as one body, one church throughout the world, we can proclaim
freedom to the poor, the addicted, the at risk of being deported, the gender-fluid,
the oppressed, the depressed, the repressed.
It starts with our being a "we," and not a collection of "me's."
It all starts with a body. It all starts Today.

.Amen

Luke 4:14-21

Then Jesus, **filled with the power of the Spirit**, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring **good news to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim **release to the captives** and **recovery of sight to the blind**, to let the **oppressed go free**, to **proclaim the year of the Lord's favor**." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the **body does not consist of one member but of many**. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 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. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.