

## **The Pursuit of Unity 8-4-24**

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Psalm 51:1-13

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

As a newly ordained person, I can tell you the process towards ordination is long and includes many steps. One of the most significant is the ability to articulate ones call to ordained ministry. I'm sure Katherine and Bill can vouch for me on this, but many many people and committees must agree that ordinands have clarity regarding their call before a bishop will lay hands on them. But "call" isn't just for ordained people. We are all called into the Body of Christ in unique ways, with unique gifts. It occurs to me that those outside ordained ministry are not always encouraged to be as clear about their own call. But no single person's call is of greater value than anyone else's. We all have our part to play.

Paul seems to have a solid grasp on this concept. Perhaps writing from prison, being himself so constrained, he recognized his need for others to participate with him. One of the most striking parts of Paul's metaphor is his attunement to the joints and ligaments supplying strength within the body. Following this image, we can recognize that sometimes its easiest to see the head of a body, it's arms, legs, hands, and feet. But anyone who has lived in a body for long knows that the joints and ligaments are what make everything that the rest of the body does, possible.

Have any of you ever been to a chiropractor? My eldest daughter Sara recently saw one. She had an injury about five years ago and has suffered from all sorts of physical complaints since. She has been to all sort of doctors, therapists, and chiropractors. But this one has a particularly remarkable reputation. The chiropractor, after viewing Sara's x-rays, listed all the things that needed work, but the immediate concern was that her apex was twisted. She said without imaging, she would have tried to just put it back in alignment, but it had to be untwisted before they could work on aligning it properly. She said it's the root of everything else going on. When Sarah talked to me a couple hours after the appointment, she told me her sinuses were draining for the first time, and I cannot tell you how many sinus and ear infections this girl has suffered,

she told me her tailbone was hurting as well as her ankle. All of this, simply from untwisting a bone. It's crazy how much we take for granted when it comes to the way, our bodies function. We say that we have a body, but it sure does take a lot of pieces of this one thing working together to make us able to function. The same can be said about our life together.

David is an ideal example of this. The king of Israel was, the head, the Apex of an entire community's hopes, the man after God's own heart. And yet, when he forgot his call, his part in the body that was Israel, he went down a particularly destructive path. Instead of using his resources to uplift his community, he started exploiting others for his own advantage. We know the result and it wasn't good. When David finally confesses his guilt, he uses the word sin to describe the failure. Everyone is familiar with the word sin, but did you know the definitions of this Hebrew concept is to be twisted. David's misalignment with his call, with his role within the greater community, was destructive because it made alignment for the whole community impossible.

One of the greatest gifts David offers us still today is his great psalm of repentance. Somehow, David recognized that even through his epic failure, and all the harm he caused, hiding away in despair, was not the way to fix the problem. He knew he had a roll to fill, and he knew the love of God. After honest confession, he trusted God to heal the damage he had caused, he repented, and he stepped back into his role among his people. Recognizing the importance of this cycle of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration, we continue to confess our sin every time we come together. We know that our misalignments with our own calling are destructive to the rest of the body. We also recognize and affirm the power and love of God, that is so much greater than any of our weakness or failings.

Being the Body of Christ requires faith. The people who followed Jesus around Capernaum were not unlike us. They liked Jesus' power. Some of them wanted the power for themselves, and others just wanted the free meal ticket that power provided. But Jesus told them the work of God is belief in God. Belief is an active word, not a passive one. And Jesus goes on to explain

why he fed the people bread; why God has always been feeding us bread. The manna of the Hebrew's in the wilderness, the bread that fed the multitudes who came to listen to Jesus, and the Christ of the Eucharist all show us that our life, individually and together, is in God. We are sustained by it in an ongoing, participatory way. It is not a distant source of power we receive once and move on from. And its purpose is not for our own gratification. It is to give life to the world. When we stay connected with God and one another, when we set our intention to find lifegiving power through God and with one another, that is the work of God and that will create life for us individually and for our communities.

Some of the hardest work we can do as God's children is the work of belief. It is not always easy to believe God has created us, in all our awkward idiosyncrasies and complicated compilations of strengths and weaknesses, as beloved and intentionally crafted works of holy art. Trusting that we are indeed called and uniquely set apart for some specific function within this Body is hard work indeed. It requires that we know ourselves well enough to repent from the things pulling us from our participation with others. Seeing our own misalignment and allowing God to untwist us so we fit better with each other is also not always easy. Equally it requires that we continually take steps to actively move into our participation together. If it's hard work to know and love ourselves, at times, it can be equally challenging to know, love, and trust others. But that is all part of the discipline of living a life worthy of the calling we each have received.

I am beyond grateful to have been called by God and by you to serve as part of the body God has grown here at Piedmont. Many of you have already illustrated for me your calling as part of Christ's body. The beauty of your joy, generosity, and hospitality are no doubt the bones and sinews of Piedmont. And I am very eager to meet the rest of you as well!

May we be a people marked by the boldness of Faith. feeding on the bread of heaven and strengthened together into the body of Christ that is Piedmont Episcopal Church.

