

Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor
January 23&24, 2010
The 3rd Sunday After the Epiphany
"Totally Inappropriate!"

Preaching is powerful, and the power is in the word of God. That word can convict us of sin and raise us to new life. That word can heal divisions in Christ's body and help us appreciate the gifts of others. And that Word has become flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. As we conclude the week of prayer for Christian unity, we join with other Christians to pray that we can come together in Christ.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Blessed Lord God, you have caused the holy scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

FIRST READING *Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10*

all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁸ So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

PSALM *Psalms 19*

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the firmament shows his handiwork.

²One day tells its tale to another,
and one night imparts knowledge to another.

³Although they have no words or language,*

and their voices | are not heard,

4their sound has gone out in- | to all lands,*
and their message to the ends | of the world.

5In the deep has he set a pavilion | for the sun;*
it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;
it rejoices like a champion to | run its course.

6It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens
and runs about to the end of | it again;*
nothing is hidden from its | burning heat. R

7The law of the LORD is perfect and re- | vives the soul;*
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom | to the innocent.

8The statutes of the LORD are just and re- | joice the heart;*
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light | to the eyes.

9The fear of the LORD is clean and en- | dures forever;*
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous | altogether.

10More to be desired are they than gold, more than | much fine gold,*
sweeter far than honey, than honey | in the comb. R

11By them also is your ser- | vant enlightened,*
and in keeping them there is | great reward.

12Who can tell how often | he offends?*

Cleanse me from my | secret faults.

13Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;
let them not get dominion | over me;*

then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a | great offense.

14Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable | in your sight,*
O LORD, my strength and | my redeemer. R

SECOND READING *1 Corinthians 12:12–31a*

¹² 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. ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

²¹ 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." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ 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; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together

with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts.

GOSPEL *Luke 4:14–21*

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ 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. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Today's meditation begins with THE TWELFTH STATION OF THE CROSS (according to the 1991 version introduced by Pope John Paul II referred to as "The Scriptural Way of the Cross.") In preparation for the Lenten season which will start in a couple weeks, I have just posted a series of 14 devotionals on our website based on the Scriptural Way of the Cross ... as follows:

TRADITIONAL WAY OF THE CROSS	SCRIPTURAL WAY OF THE CROSS
1. JESUS IS CONDEMNED	1. JESUS PRAYS IN THE GARDEN
2. JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS	2. JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED
3. JESUS FALLS	3. JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE SANHEDRIN

4. JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER	4. PETER DENIES KNOWING JESUS
5. SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS	5. JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY PILATE
6. VERONICA WIPES JESUS' FACE	6. JESUS IS SCOURGED AND CROWNED WITH THORNS
7. JESUS FALLS AGAIN	7. JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS
8. JESUS MEETS THE WEEPING WOMEN	8. SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS
9. JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME	9. JESUS MEETS THE WEEPING WOMEN
10. JESUS IS STRIPPED	10. JESUS IS CRUCIFIED
11. JESUS IS CRUCIFIED	11. JESUS PROMISES PARADISE TO THE CRUCIFIED THIEF
12. JESUS DIES	12. JESUS CARES FOR HIS MOTHER
13. JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS	13. JESUS DIES
14. JESUS IS BURIED	14. JESUS IS BURIED

According to the GOOD NEWS ("Gospel") as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew (27:55-56), Mark (15:40-41), and Luke (23:49), many women were witnesses to the crucifixion. Matthew and Mark mention that Jesus' mother Mary was one of them. The Gospel of John (19:25-27) includes Jesus' words to his mother and to the "beloved disciple."

Capital punishment death scenes often include the mother, sometimes the father, and occasionally both of them. In some way or other, the one who is about to die has a final visit with or makes a final telephone call to his parent(s). If the one who is about to die is guilty, we always hope he will ask for forgiveness. If the one who is about to die seems to be wrongly sentenced, we keep hoping there will be a last minute pardon, and if not we hope he will continue to profess his innocence right up to the end.

In this Passion Story, there was no last minute pardon. The sentence has been executed in full ... Jesus has been impaled on the cross ... and now he is nearing his last breath. But even still, Jesus is in control and speaks out of love. He now commends his mother and his disciple to each other ... he entrusts them into each other's care ...

From now on, Jesus says, the two of you are family. From now on, you will take care of each other. From now on, you will love each other. From now on, you will eat with each other.

I suppose for John there was a sense of "Church" in this Word from the Cross. From that moment on, we have become a family ... from that moment on we have become the Body of Christ ... from that moment on we have been called to live together in unity and harmony ... from that moment on we have been invited to eat together in the family's meal, the Eucharist, the Table of the Lord,

For this Twelfth Station of The Cross, consider the hymn from the 13th Century, "At the Cross, Her Station Keeping" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* #110.) Then turn one page to #112, "Jesus, in Thy Dying Woes" Part III:

(7) Jesus, loving to the end
Her whose heart thy sorrows rend,
And thy dearest human friend:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

(9) May we all thy loved ones be,
All one holy family,
Loving for the love of thee:
Hear us, holy Jesus."

Like Sister Sledge sang in 1979 - "We are Family" ... and what today's lesson from Corinthians is saying is that division within that family is ABSOLUTELY INAPPROPRIATE.

It is ABSOLUTE INAPPROPRIATE for any part of this family to throw any other part of this family out.

It is ABOLUSTELY INAPPROPRIATE for this family to be divided.

It was a long journey from the temple in Jesus' home town where he speaks today's Gospel to Corinth the Christian community to whom Paul addresses today's letter. But the journey really wasn't any longer than from the brain to the heart ... for the one who taught in the synagogues and apparently inspired everyone who heard him is the same one who inspired Paul to help his hearers and readers understand that though they had faith, hope, and love ... the greatest of them was AND STILL IS love.

Did Paul really mean that? Did Paul really mean that love trumps doctrine? Did Paul really mean that love trumps hope? Did Paul really mean that it is more important for the Body of Christ to always get along than to always get it right? Did Paul really mean that disunity within the Body is more evil than disagreements (major or minor) within the Body?

Well, as we like to say today ... you do the math! You read the text!

ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΟΥΣ Α΄ 13:13 (1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament)

¹³ΝΥΝΙ ΔΕ ΜΕΝΕΙ ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΕΛΠΙΣ ΑΓΑΠΗ ΤΑ ΤΡΙΑ ΤΑΥΤΑ ΜΕΙΖΩΝ ΔΕ ΤΟΥΤΩΝ Η ΑΓΑΠΗ

Shall we throw those words into the Martin Luther's bonfire along with the Letter of James? Shall we just do minor surgery and conclude 1 Corinthians 13 with the statement that "now abide three things: faith, hope, and love."

I don't believe these words were originally intended as a nice reading for weddings ... even though 75% of the hundreds of weddings I've been involved with have probably chosen this reading.

I have a sense that these words were originally intended as what we would call a "Mission Statement" for congregations and for congregational life ... and what that mission statement was saying and is saying to the Church (including our own is) ... "for the sake of the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed, get your act together ... work together ... stay together ... the family must not be divided."

These are hard words for the very church which is the Body of Christ to hear since it has been divided now for almost 1000 years. After the first millennium of unity as the Church emerged and settled with its center in Rome with only one major division ... and that was as the Church separated itself from its Jewish cradle of the first century. Developing and proclaiming the treasure both of the sacred Scriptures which were unique to the Christian Church as well as the sacred Scriptures shared with Judaism, in that first 1,000 years the Church had to define (and sometimes not very nice) its relationship with Judaism.

In the second 1,000 years, the first division happened in 1054 when the Roman and the Eastern churches divided in a type of Civil War within and between the two centers of Christianity ... and then most of us should know what happened in Germany in 1517 as Martin Luther challenged works righteousness ... and then King Henry VIII in England challenged the authority of the Pope by establishing his own structure in what we now know as the Church of England ... and then divisions continued over matters of musical instruments, pipe organs was a major controversy, liturgical vestments, Biblical knowledge, depth and age of baptism, wine or grape juice in communion, marriage or celibacy of clergy ... the rights of women ... slavery of African Americans ... the rights of Native American Indians ... divorce within the church ... contemporary worship ... using video screens ... ordination of women ... abortion ... sexual orientation ... to our most recent issue of how the church will respond to same sex marriage in general and potential clergy who are in a committed same sex relationship.

And to all of these things that would develop within the Church which is the Body of Christ Paul said: "for the sake of the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed, get your act together ... work together ... stay together ... the family must not be divided."

What is interesting to me is that during my life time each of these issues has been addressed ... I wonder if the third 1,000 years of Christianity will find the Body UNDIVIDING as we seeks to separate the chaff from the seeds of Church history ... as we move on from decisions made because of political or cultural influences as well as sexism and racism or basically a result of Biblical ignorance.

Paul's words are a warning to anyone and to all who purposefully set out to cause division within the church: debate if you must and do so with mutual respect ... division should not be an option.

Tomorrow/Today we have a congregational meeting here in this space. As we prepare for that meeting, I ask you to join hands with each other as we pray the prayer that Jesus prayed with his disciples for and with his disciples according to John 17 (The Message):

¹⁻⁵ Jesus said these things. Then, raising his eyes in prayer, he said:

Father, it's time.

Display the bright splendor of your Son

So the Son in turn may show your bright splendor.

You put him in charge of everything human

So he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.

And this is the real and eternal life:

That they know you,

The one and only true God,

And Jesus Christ, whom you sent.

I glorified you on earth

By completing down to the last detail

What you assigned me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me with your very own splendor,

The very splendor I had in your presence

Before there was a world.

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⁶⁻¹²I spelled out your character in detail

To the men and women you gave me.

They were yours in the first place;

Then you gave them to me,

And they have now done what you said.

They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt,

That everything you gave me is firsthand from you,

For the message you gave me, I gave them;
And they took it, and were convinced
That I came from you.
They believed that you sent me.
I pray for them.
I'm not praying for the God-rejecting world
But for those you gave me,
For they are yours by right.
Everything mine is yours, and yours mine,
And my life is on display in them.
For I'm no longer going to be visible in the world;
They'll continue in the world
While I return to you.
Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life
That you conferred as a gift through me,
So they can be one heart and mind
As we are one heart and mind.
As long as I was with them, I guarded them
In the pursuit of the life you gave through me;
I even posted a night watch.
And not one of them got away,
Except for the rebel bent on destruction
(the exception that proved the rule of Scripture).

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¹³⁻¹⁹Now I'm returning to you.

I'm saying these things in the world's hearing
So my people can experience
My joy completed in them.
I gave them your word;
The godless world hated them because of it,
Because they didn't join the world's ways,
Just as I didn't join the world's ways.
I'm not asking that you take them out of the world
But that you guard them from the Evil One.
They are no more defined by the world
Than I am defined by the world.
Make them holy—consecrated—with the truth;
Your word is consecrating truth.
In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world,
I give them a mission in the world.
I'm consecrating myself for their sakes
So they'll be truth-consecrated in their mission.

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²⁰⁻²³I'm praying not only for them
But also for those who will believe in me
Because of them and their witness about me.
The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
So they might be one heart and mind with us.
Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.
The same glory you gave me, I gave them,
So they'll be as unified and together as we are—
I in them and you in me.
Then they'll be mature in this oneness,
And give the godless world evidence
That you've sent me and loved them
In the same way you've loved me.

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²⁴⁻²⁶Father, I want those you gave me
To be with me, right where I am,
So they can see my glory, the splendor you gave me,
Having loved me
Long before there ever was a world.
Righteous Father, the world has never known you,
But I have known you, and these disciples know
That you sent me on this mission.
I have made your very being known to them—
Who you are and what you do—
And continue to make it known,
So that your love for me
Might be in them
Exactly as I am in them.

[The Message \(MSG\)](#)

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I close with two examples of how much more stronger living right is than being right.

Consider the "Hope for Haiti" international telethon on Friday night. Could it be that technology is helping us understand what it means to be one global village ... and having learned such powerful lessons from Hurricane Katrina, 911, and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (which also killed @200,000 people), could it be that we are learning how to unite in our diversity and yet work in harmony to bring healing and hope to and for a hurting world.

My best friend and I have been in a state of mutual coexistence and silence since the Churchwide Assembly ... but since I found out after Haiti's earthquake that his cousin's son, a seminarian, is one of the victims of that disaster ... and his memorial service was broadcast live over the internet on Friday afternoon ... we have been talking frequently again ... and it could be that once again, as Paul says, "God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,"²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another."

It is something like Stephen Ministry ... CARE for one another ... not CURE of one another.

UNITY not DIVISION

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began in 1908 as the **Octave of Christian Unity**, and focused on prayer for church unity. The dates of the week were proposed by Father [Paul Wattson](#), cofounder of the [Graymoor](#) Franciscan Friars. He conceived of the week beginning on the [Feast of the Confession of Peter](#), the [Protestant](#) variant of the ancient Feast of the [Chair of Saint Peter](#), on 18 January, and concluding with the [Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul](#) on 25 January.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Week_of_Prayer_for_Christian_Unity

NOW FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE ABIDE ... THESE THREE ... BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS (drum roll please) LOVE.

Grant this, O Lord, unto us all.

Amen!