

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
August 27, 2017
Exodus 1:8-2:10, Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

A man walks up to the hot dog vendor and says, "Make me one with everything." The vendor looks at him..... and then says, "Oh, you want a hotdog!" The vendor hands over the hotdog and the man hands him a \$20. Nothing happens. "Hey, " the man says, "no change?" The vendor answers, "Everyone knows that change comes from within."

That could be my sermon for today. It says everything!

In the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, he refers to the "one body in Christ" – that WE are that one body. "Not all members of the body have the same function," he says, but each one of us has an important role to play in this body – to keep it healthy, thriving, and enjoying and reflecting the love of God.

This sense of belonging, of being so intimately and necessarily connected to God and to one another is an amazing concept. But more than a concept, a breathtaking reality. "We are members of each other," Paul points out. So when we pray that Christ live in, with and through us, we enter into this reality.

It's difficult to speak of this reality without reducing it to less than a miracle. Without imposing our own ideas or experiences on another. If we use the image of the body once again, of course the hand's experience and perception of the world will be different from the eye's. But what richness we have when we can share and support each other with what we're each uniquely able to see, know and do.

St. Teresa of Avila wrote, ““Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

As whole human beings and parts of the body of Christ, we are both separate and one. And in this both/and place, we have so much more power to contribute to life than I think we fully understand. In communion with God, we have “the power to loose the power of heaven here on earth” as Jesus says in the Gospel reading today. What kind of power is this?

I think of prayer. How little we know about prayer. Fr. Thomas Keating has said there is no ineffective prayer time, only the times we fail to show up. My own teacher, Cynthia Bourgeault has said, “We simply have no idea of the power of prayer.” If we are one body, the body of Christ, and we pray for each member, in this way we take time to care for each other so it makes perfect sense to me that we are touching each other in a wonderful way.

Let’s just take a minute right now to pray for each other. Either collectively for the parish of St. Mary’s, or for one or two people here today specifically. Just in silence, reach out in prayer, extend your awareness and care to those you’ve chosen. I’ll say “amen” after a short while.....

..... Now, I’m going to invite you to sit again in silence in a minute. As a part of this body, *your* well-being is critical to each one of us. So I invite you to sit and welcome and accept the prayers of those people who have just been praying for

you. You are not only a giver, you are a receiving. A body only works well when it engages in this divine exchange. You might want to focus on your heart area.

My recent pilgrimage experience taught me how unique each one of us is. And how connected we all are. As I said before, it took me a couple of hard knocks to realize that while I was walking the Camino with my husband, each of us was walking our own pilgrimage with our own learnings and challenges. But as Jim has suggested when he heard me say this, we were simultaneously walking another pilgrimage, together, as a couple, deepening our mutual relationship with God and each other.

Some of you may have heard the interview Anna Maria Tremonte, host of the CBC show “The Current,” did recently with Dion Leonard, a man who ran a grueling ultra marathon through the Gobi desert. He was a contender for first place when he noticed a little dog running by his side. He assumed it belonged to one of the organizers but after a couple of days, it became clear that this dog belonged to no one. And had chosen to run beside Dion. This dog had no one to provide him with water and food in this hostile environment and Dion made the decision to share his precious provisions with his little follower. When the dog was unable to ford a river, Dion made the decision to lose precious minutes to turn back and get the dog and carry him across. Each decision to care brought Dion to the point where he realized that while winning the race was still important to him, it was no longer the most important thing. Caring for this little creature who had chosen to accompany him along such a challenging test of endurance, opened his heart.

I believe Dion came in second in the race. But what he won, was the love and friendship of the little dog, whom he calls Gobi. There's more to the story and you can find it on the CBC Radio website, or the book by Dion Leonard entitled "Gobi the Dog." Dion and Gobi are separate beings but their bond is equally as solid and real as their individuality. Both / and.

Recently someone who was feeling guilty about not spending time with God said, "Why would God bother to spend time with me and my little problems? He has so many people and problems to contend with."

I didn't use this quote. I wish I had.

"Our asking, Where is God? is like a fish asking, Where is water?"

God is all around, in and with us. Always. Our challenge is to become present enough to see and acknowledge God in every moment.

It's hard to put into words what God is; our words and ideas are simply too small! It's sometimes easier to say what God is not. And that can be helpful. God is not constrained by the human experience of time. God is in all places and at all times. As we say every Sunday, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."

God is with the hotdog vendor and his words of wisdom and with Dion and Gobi in the desert; God is with you and with me. All at the same time.

God was with Moses and Jesus and Peter. Because our God is a god of relationships. In and between people; and animals and creation. Our God gets downright personal. God came down to earth to share in our human experience. To show us the extent to which we are loved. Personally and communally.

When I was first exploring Christianity, I talked a lot about what I was learning. One day I was holding hands and walking with our youngest son. Theo. He was around 5 years old. He was asking me about God. And I said that God is expressed and seen through the love and beauty we see around us. He looked up at me with a blank face. So I tried again. "Can you feel that space between our hands?" He nodded. I continued, "It's not empty, you know. What's there is the great love we have for each other - captured and held." We can't see it but we know it, don't we?" He nodded again. That's how I imagine God holds and loves us. In the spaces between. In the colours and in the darkness.

We need our bodies to show our love for one another. To speak kind and encouraging words, to pray for each other, to cook for each other and rub each other's feet. God needs us to care for each other. To build up the body of Christ. So that by our love, others will come to know God's love for them.

So let us share together, as one body, the sacred meal that changes our hearts and fashions us into the body we are called to live in.

Through Jesus' name,

Amen.