

1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27 3rd Sunday after Epiphany Jan. 22, 1989

An artist chose to create something new.

Others would begin with a piece of stone, of marble, and chisel ~~away~~ the bits and pieces until the shape and beauty contained within that ~~same~~ stone all along ~~waxx~~ ^{are} freed to be seen. But our artist chose something new.

Others would take clay of the right texture, the ~~proper~~ perfect consistency and shape and mold until all was even and ready for the oven. But this artist chose something new.

This is what he did. From all across the world he gathered bits of soil, of clay. ^{Light} brown hues, ^{deep} redish, ^{fine} sand from the seashore, heavy blue gumbo clay from the prairies, ~~From the north and from the south he gathered.~~ Because he wanted to encompass the whole world in this work, he was tireless in his search. Soil from the islands, from the mountains, from deep within the jungles and rainforests, from ~~beneath~~ the arctic tundra he gathered. There was nowhere he did not go, no barriers did he allow to stand in his way ~~and~~ all was gathered.

~~From~~ With great care he ^{formed} ~~began~~ his ^{work} ~~assembly~~. It would have been simple for him to have tossed all his bits of soil together into a great tub or something like a kitchen blender and mixed and stirred it all together, homogenizing. But his was a much more ambitious plan. He wanted to preserve the brightness, the whiteness of of the mediterranean ~~seashore~~ seashore sand, the redbrown of the soil of the western black hills. The shades and textures of the soil from Asia, and Africa, from North America he wanted to retain. This is what he did:

He took each bit of soil and with water joined it to the next. Yellow hues next to the beige hues, deep brown next to the ^{loam} bluish black clay. He shaped his work of art in the joining, making a human form. When he was finished it was like no work of art ever seen before.

Then the artist breathed into his creation his own breath, his spirit, called it the body of his son.

For as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body - many as they are - form one body, so also is Christ. Yes, in one spirit all of us - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - were baptized to form one ^{body} ~~body~~, and we all were given to drink of that one spirit.

We are not a volutary gathering of individuals, we are God's new creation. We are not cembmed together by our common interests, our common goals but God's hand has grasped us, he wet ~~by the hand of God grasping us~~, wetting us in baptsim that we might be held firmly to the body he is creating. We are no longer left as we were, on our own, belonging to no one or nothing, we are joined with Jews and Greeks, Hispanics and Africans, ~~and male and female~~ joined in one body, Christ.

~~This is God's doing~~ As Paul writes in the letter to the Galations:

~~Paul writing to the Corinthians wants them to understand the reality in which they live. Some there must have thought that he could share the spirit of Jesus without being part of his body. Like this today we say we can be Christians without being part of the church. We are the church our creation simply our way of keeping people organized and less lonely they would be right but as the church is God's work, the body of Christ God's artistry. ~~He can't~~ For indeed the human body is not made up~~

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male not female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. This is God's ^{activity, his creation, his doing,} ~~doing~~.

Become what you are, was a favorite phrase among Lutheran teachers some years ago. You are a child of God freed from sin, no longer under the power of death, in God's sight holy and righteous, a saint. Become what you are.

Today we might apply that phrase to the church. We are God's new creation. We are the body of Christ. The last chapter of the book was written in our baptism. Our place in God's great work of art is already fixed. He has plucked us up and wet us, and placed us. ~~He~~ Paul writes: Now you are the body of Christ and ~~individually~~ each of you is an individual part of it. ^{if you'll remember another part of scripture shall add:} This is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

And Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read, and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He open the book and found the place where it was written, The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant, and the ~~eyes of~~ ^{eyes of} all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

And so it was, the blind received their sight, the deaf heard, sinners were forgiven. The oppressed were set at liberty. Where Jesus went there was healing and help and hope. All that divided and separated and isolated was overcome. Even the power of death ^{was broken} in Jesus dying and rising. Yes, the promises of God were filled full in Jesus Christ.

Now, you are the body of Christ. God has not gathered from all across the world from every nation and race and people, in order that his work of art might sit on the shelf. He has not one by one wet and placed us into the body of his son just that we might be admired. He was not breathed into us his own breath, his ^{Holy} spirit, ~~giving us the bad breath~~ that we might be lifeless. God has shaped his work of art for service.

Now you are the body of Christ. Today oppression is all around, enslavement to sin and sinning is as near as our own homes. Captives to hunger, and political differences and every sort of suffering cry out. In answer these are the words he puts in our mouths: The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

As Jesus ~~was~~ ^{announced}, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your

hearing, so this day, Christ, in his body is about the same ~~fulfilling~~ deed
of filling these words full. In deeds of love, in mercy, in giving, in
~~sharing~~ in forgiving, in listening Christ through his body still fulfills
the promises of almighty God. Most of all, ^{we speak} ~~in~~ ~~our~~ ~~speaking~~ that name which
is above every name, the name of Jesus, to those who have not heard or believe.
We tell them of Jesus who so loved them that he gave his life that they might live. We tell of Jesus that
~~that~~ God might grasp another piece of clay, wet it in these waters and add it
to his great work of art.

One day his work shall be complete, the body of his son fully formed.
Until that day we are sent out to gather, that every one in every place might
be ^{wet} ~~gathered~~ into Christ.