

"Scripture Fulfilled"

Rev. Jeff Bacon

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Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, may your promises revealed by Jesus be fulfilled in our hearing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Terry's reading to us this morning from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains one of the most famous metaphors in the history of Christianity. The metaphor likens the diversity of individual church members to a living human body that has many different parts, all of which are important to the proper functioning of the body.

There once was an argument among the various body parts regarding the importance of their individual roles in the functioning of the body. The brain said that it was the most important part of the body because the brain was the centre of reasoning and thought, and coordinated many internal and external functions of the body. The heart disagreed with the brain and said that the heart was the most important part of the body because it pumped life-giving blood throughout the body and was at the heart of love and goodness. The rest of the body parts were pretty quiet until the anus quietly suggested that it was the most important part of the body. The brain and the heart, and the eyes and the ears, and the stomach and the legs, and many other body parts all laughed. There was no way that the anus was more important than the brain and the heart. The anus' feelings were hurt. So, quietly, the anus decided to demonstrate its importance. After two days of remaining closed tight, the brain and heart began to be concerned. After two weeks, the whole body wasn't working very well: the brain could no longer think straight; the heart was beating way too fast; the eyes couldn't see and the ears couldn't hear; the stomach ached and the legs wobbled. None of the body parts were functioning properly. The anus had demonstrated its critical role in the proper functioning of the whole body and the body parts never again argued over who was the most important part of the body!

It's too bad that Paul didn't tell this story to the Corinthians! Maybe it's what Paul is referring to when he says, "But God has arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissention within the body."

Luke tells us about the body of Christ through a sermon that Jesus delivers in a synagogue. It might be the shortest sermon ever! Jesus starts with a two-sentence reading from the beginning of Chapter 61 of the Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah: "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 favour." And then Jesus delivers his interpretation of the passage, in effect his sermon, in one short sentence: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In the passage immediately before this passage today, Jesus is tempted by the devil for forty days in the wilderness and then after resisting the devil, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," and the devil departs. Luke then describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry: Jesus is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit; news of his teaching spreads quickly and widely; he preaches in the synagogues; and he's praised by everyone. When Jesus arrives at his small home town of Nazareth, everything starts out OK. On the Sabbath, Jesus enters the familiar synagogue where he has attended with his family since childhood. He knows the people by name and they know him. He's asked to read from the Hebrew Scriptures and to interpret the reading, so Jesus stands on a special platform to read from the prophet Isaiah and then he sits down to preach, as was their custom. Jesus tells them in his short sermon, that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy. Jesus preaches an inclusive message for all believers that's difficult for the people of his hometown to accept. In the very next passage, we'll discover that "They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

This incident in Nazareth foreshadows Jesus' entire ministry. Jesus is initially praised by everyone, but just as his hometown friends turn against him, so too will the people who crucify him. Despite the good news of Jesus bringing freedom to the poor and oppressed, humanity is always wrestling with the power of sin and temptation on the one hand, and the difficulty of living in loving community on the other. Jesus helps us to interpret the reality of God's love in the midst of our human brokenness: how this scripture is fulfilled in our hearing.

Tim Huff started Light Patrol, a program of the Christian organization, Youth Unlimited that sends out a team of volunteers to be among homeless youth wherever they are: on the streets, in alleyways, under bridges, or hanging out in parks. The focus is on rebuilding trust and guiding young people toward healthy adulthood. I volunteered with Light Patrol every Thursday night for six years. Before his stroke, Cliff Gabel came out with us and met with some of Toronto's homeless folks. In a very moving encounter, Cliff gave the belt from his own pants to a homeless fellow who needed a belt.

In his book, *The Yuletide Factor*, Tim tells us about Trudy, a young girl whose story is very personal, yet could also be the story of dozens of other young girls we met and got to know while out with Light Patrol. Tim says that Trudy "didn't expect, or want, anything from anyone ... [and] didn't care if people pitied her, frowned on her or ignored her." Most days, Trudy sat, totally emotionally insulated with a torn paper coffee cup to collect the change she survived on.

Trudy's parents were pretty rough around the edges and Trudy only received love and comfort from her Mom's Mom – her Gramma. It's where Trudy felt warmth. It's where Trudy felt softness. It's where secrets and promises were whispered in her ear. Trudy loved her Gramma. But unfortunately, her Gramma died. Trudy's Mom's mental health crisis deepened and she fled without a goodbye. Trudy's Dad was in equally bad shape and he worsened by the day. One day, Trudy came home from school and her Dad had ransacked the apartment in a drunken fit – everything was broken and ruined. Trudy gathered sixty seconds worth of items in her pack, stepped over her passed out father and never looked back. When Tim met Trudy, it was almost a year later, just before Christmas in the

cold, dark, wintery slush of downtown Toronto. Trudy was definitely poor, and definitely needed some good news. She was captive to the downward spiral of street life and unable to see the joy of living.

Tim got to know Trudy over several weeks, although he never got to know where Trudy hid and slept when she wasn't panning in front of her usual storefronts. Levels of trust develop over time: first, a street name; then a real name; a hometown; a family; a current hiding place; drug addictions; stories of abuse; dreams and aspirations; tears on your shoulder. But Trudy did tell Tim about the broken red ball Christmas ornament that hung from her pack while she was panning and was neatly packed away in a homemade box when she travelled.

The previous December, Trudy had set up her Gramma's Christmas tree and decorated it exactly as her Gramma used to, with red lights, red ball ornaments, red tinsel, even a red star. In her sixty second scramble through the ransacked apartment, one of the things Trudy picked up as she was going out the door was one of the broken red ball ornaments from her Gramma's Christmas tree. Trudy cherished this broken ornament; she protected it in a box intricately crafted from things she'd found on the street; she safely carried it with her everywhere; and she dangled it from her pack as a reminder of her Gramma's love. It was a reminder like a wedding ring of promises made in a broken world. A broken ornament that continues to hold her Gramma's promises of joy in Trudy's broken life.

I wish that I could tell you that Trudy is now living a joyful and productive life. I hope so, but I don't know what has happened to Trudy. It seems meaningful to me though that Trudy's symbolic remnant of joy is a Christmas ornament. A joyful symbol of Christ's coming as a baby; the answer to our waiting through Advent; the revelation of the Son of God, our gift of God's hope, peace, joy and love; the epiphany that scripture is fulfilled in Jesus' coming and in our hearing. God is working on the streets of Toronto and God is working in us. We are servants in God's world; messengers of God's love; members of one body. Scripture is being fulfilled in our hearing. Thanks be to God. Amen.