

**May 22, 2022. Rev Katheryn McGinnis**

Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from first Corinthians chapter 12, verses 12-26. Listen now for the word of the lord.

**12** Christ is just like the human body — a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. **13** We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. **14** Certainly the body isn't one part but many. **15** If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? **16** If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? **17** If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. **19** If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? **20** But as it is, there are many parts but one body. **21** So the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you," or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." **22** Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. **23** The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. **24** The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor **25** so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. **26** If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The month of May charges us to do something that we're too often terrible at: to talk openly and vulnerably and honestly about Mental health. May is mental health awareness month, and while we have in the past, and still often are, terrible about talking about mental health, because we deem it shameful, embarrassing, a weakness, these past two years have forced the importance of mental health into the limelight.

In March 2020, our lives went from being "normal" one day to shut down the next. Months of isolation and stress and fear.

Then a number of racially motivated violent crimes happened that unearthed the violent racial history on which our country was made and formed, then a presidential election that fractured our already fractured country even further, then an attack on the capital, then more waves of Covid, and just recently a war.

My goodness ! What we have endured these past two years. And still endure. We have had much to hold, much that we still carry. And our mental health has suffered.

Of course it has. How can it not?

I don't think it's a stretch to say that all of us here worshipping together, whether in this sanctuary or on zoom, have all experienced to some degree our own mental health struggles these past two years.

Feeling depressed, feeling grief, feeling fear, uncertainty, anxiety, as our world has been turned upside down.

And all those heavy emotions are real, and they are valid. And we must talk about them and how they have affected us. Not just as individuals, or a community, but as a church. As a people of faith gathered here by the love of Jesus Christ.

Lucky for us, the conversation has already started. Famous and accomplished athletes like gymnast Simone Biles, and tennis player Naomi Osaka, have taken the charge and been brutally and bravely honest about their own mental health struggles. Paving the way for us to do the same.

Our scripture for this morning comes from one of the Apostle Paul's letters to the Church in Corinth in about the year 54 CE.

Corinth was the capitol city of the Roman province of Achaia and it was a large and prospering urban center with an ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse population. And the church in Corinth, a church that Paul founded, reflected this diversity.

It was economically diverse too, with some members probably of more considerable social and economic prominence, but most members had lesser means. Had lower social standings. Different people from different cultures, different background, different lives, gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ.

And all of this diversity created conflict and confusion about how to be the church. A church whose members were so different from each other.

How do all of their different backgrounds work into this new identity as a church? How do all of their different customs that seem to conflict with each other work together as a church?

So they wrote to Paul about specific disputes they were having, rooted in this diversity, and he writes back. He writes this letter. And the heart of his answer to all these specific dispute, is that diversity is beautiful.

That unity in a church and diversity in a church do not contradict each other. They actually add to fullness of the church and the fullness of the gospel. It is when we are unified in our diversity that we see Christ more clearly. That the church takes root. Builds a strong foundation. And spreads.

To explain this, Paul paints a picture, gives them an image. The church is the body of Christ. And as all bodies have parts that are different and do different things, all are essential to the body.

Just as we are all different. We have different backgrounds, look different, have different strengths and weaknesses, have different social and economic standings, have different ways we love and live. All these differences do not stand in our way of being the church. Just the opposite.

These differences are essential to being the body of Christ. A body unified in its diversity. Our minds are different too. The way our minds are wired are different.

And for some of us, the way our minds are created, how they function, how they are wired, how they see the world, causes us to carry depression, anxiety, stress, grief, and fear.

In a heavier load, which causes us to act “differently”. In such a way that others do not, in a way our culture does not understand, nor wants to.

But this, too, adds to the fullness of the body of Christ. For those who struggle with mental health, those whose brains are wired differently, those who fit under the umbrella of neurodiversity, who see the world through a lens others cannot see.

And in each lens through which we view the world, Christ becomes a bit clearer. The body of Christ becomes a bit stronger.

We are still in the season of Easter. We are still meant to sit in resurrection. To pause with awe and wonder as we discern and imagine what it means to be the RESURRECTED body of Christ.

As we know from the gospels and as I’ve preached this Easter season, Christ’s resurrected body was a broken body. A body with holes in his hands, a wound in his side, with bruises and lashes from being beaten and whipped. A body unhealed. But a body, in all its brokenness, that bore witness to the power of resurrection.

A body that testifies that we are resurrected to life NOW and the hope of what is to come. All things made new. God’s kingdom here on earth as in heaven.

The resurrected body has a mind too. And what a beautiful mind it is.

For promise of resurrection means that we are given new life in and THROUGH our neurodiversity.

And this new life, this resurrected life, does not “fix”, our neurodiversity, does not “fix” mental health, but illuminates and celebrates how resurrection works through neurodiversity to help the body of Christ reach a bit closer to the kingdom of God here on earth.

But this doesn't take away the pain and suffering mental health can cause. And still causes.

But to be the body of Christ, to be this church in this tumultuous world right now, at the very least it means we must push back curtain of shame, of weakness, of judgement that we cover up mental illness and neurodiversity with. And allow them to come to the forefront.

As Paul tells the Corinthians in his letter, the body of Christ is solidified and united in diversity through Christ's love. The love of Christ is an authentic love. A vulnerable love. An all encompassing love.

It is from Christ's love that we begin to talk about mental illness, to create space to share our struggles with it, to see the beauty that neurodiversity does bring to our lives.

It is from Christ's love that we ultimately realize and embrace that doing our part to create the kingdom of God here on earth means creating a world today that does not ostracize and marginalize and shame neurodiversity.

Does not try to make the neurodiverse change who they are to fit our naive notion of what life should look like. But instead strives to see neurodiversity and mental health and all its complex beauty in the ups and downs, joy and pain, that it brings. Strive to see Christ working through it all.

We have the tools to do this. In this mental health awareness month, in all that we have carried these past two years, and still carry. We have the tools to come together as a community of faith and share this load. For we have Christ's love.

We are the resurrected body of Christ. A broken and unhealed body, but a body that in this unbrokenness can make all things new.

Not in a world to come, but right now. God's kingdom, here on earth. Amen.