

Sermon for Sunday, February 7, 2016
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

One of the things I most love about this service we have at our annual meeting each year is the way we sit.

For most of our services at St James
we sit in rows,
all facing the same direction, except for the Eucharistic ministers, acolytes and choir.
And all that most of us see of each other
is the backs
of other people's heads.
And while you can tell a little about someone
from the back of their head - do they have hair or not,
perhaps what age they are,
whether their shoulders are slumped or they stand straight,
you can tell a whole lot more
by their faces.

Faces
are a theme in today's readings.
Moses
comes down from the mountain where he met God
and the people can see it in his face,
shining so brightly
with the reflection of God
that they are afraid.

In the gospel
when Jesus goes up the mountain,
as he prays, even before Moses and Elijah show upon the scene,
his clothes become dazzling white
and his face changes,
changes
so that it shows
the glory of God.

And in the second letter to the Corinthians

Paul writes about the way that each and every one of us
who are followers of Jesus Christ,
each of us
reflects God on our faces.

Here today
we celebrate the Eucharist
looking at one another's faces.

There is archaeological evidence
that in the first few centuries of the church,
at least in monasteries in Egypt,
the Eucharist was celebrated
at round tables
not unlike these.

And perhaps the reason was
that it was important,
it was important to those early monastics
as they received
the body and blood of Christ,
and experienced Christ's presence,
it was important that they could see one another's faces
because there they would see
the reflection of
God.

Because God is not just out there,
not just at the altar,
God is in us,
and God is reflected
in our faces.

And that shouldn't surprise us.
Because in the very beginning
in Genesis chapter one,
human beings are made
in the image of God.

We're not God,
 but we're like God,
 like God enough
 that you can see God
 in our faces.

And when the angel comes to Mary
 to tell her that she is to have a child
 the angel tells her
 that this child will be called
 Emmanuel,
 God with us.
 God will be seen
 in his face.

And then, in turn
 Jesus will be seen
 in our faces.

There is a poem
 attributed to Teresa of Avila
 who lived in the sixteenth century,

She wrote:

Christ Has No Body
 Christ has no body but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 Compassion on this world,
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
 Yours are the hands, with 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 but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
 Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Not only do we reflect Christ's face,

we are Christ's body
here on earth.

That's something
that the apostle Paul wrote a lot about,
particularly in chapter 12 of his first letter to the Corinthians.

It was the lectionary reading a couple of weeks ago, though we missed the second half of it because of the snowstorm.

So I'd like to read it to you again.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

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. 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.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to 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. And if the ear were to 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. 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 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.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 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. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

We are the body of Christ, each and every one of us.
 We reflect Christ's face
 in our faces;
 we do the work of Christ
 in our bodies.

Remember that a body has hundreds of working parts.
 There are eyes and ears and knees and elbows,
 stomachs and hearts and livers and kidneys,
 muscles and tendons and ligaments,
 veins and arteries and nerves.
 Some of them necessary to the function of the whole.

The veins and arteries carry blood around
 pumped by the heart,
 and the lung oxygenates the heart.
 Toes help us balance.
 Knees allow us to flex and walk.
 Thighs are strong.
 Nerves communicate messages to and from the brain.
 Each of them working together to make a functional body.

There is a large piece of paper on your tables.

I'd like you to turn it over,
and think about what part of the body you are.
And what other parts can you identify here in our parish.
How are we together
the body of Christ?