

August 23, 2020

**“Being the Beautiful Body”  
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

*Scripture Readings:*

*Psalm 138*

*I give you thanks, O God, with my whole heart;  
before the gods I sing your praise;  
I bow down towards your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name  
for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;  
for you have exalted your name  
and your word above everything.  
On the day I called, you answered me,  
you increased my strength of soul.  
For though God is high, God regards the lowly;  
but the haughty, God perceives from far away.  
Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;  
you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.  
God will fulfill God's purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O God, endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.*

*Romans 12:1-8*

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

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The first time I think I started to grasp this passage in Romans I was at a church where we were members a few years back. Julie and I had just finished one of our sermons in song and a member had been deeply touched. She hugged me, like we used to do in the olden days, and she was crying as she said “I wish I had something like that to give to God”.

I remember being a little gobsmacked by this. Because this was a woman that had one of the most generous spirits I had ever encountered. She single handedly showed us an extravagant welcome the first time we came to church and continued to make us feel welcome every Sunday we visited. It was her warmth and inclusion that was such a balm at a time when I needed a balm. She had the gift of a generous spirit. I told her that on the spot and she dismissed it like it was nothing. I think it was so much a part of who she was that she didn't understand how important it was to the body of Christ.

I have felt that welcome here too not just by one of you but by all of you and I have been here long enough to start seeing just how many gifts you all have. You may dismiss them but only because they are so much a part of you that you can't see them. Like a fish just takes his swimming skills for granted. I know that you all have the gift of tenacity and loyalty. Like the psalmist said you have walked in the midst of trouble, but persevered and let God fulfill God's purpose in you and through you.

When rough times came, when members left, you didn't just get depressed and fold up and call it quits. You figured out ways to continue to be the hands and feet of God. You continued to be the Body of Christ in the world.

Some pastors go into churches with just a few members kind of like hospice pastor. They are there to help the church grieve it's ending and to let go. I do not feel that way here at all. There is a palpable energy in this church that tells me it is far from done with being the body of Christ in this world.

Some of you have the gift of vision to imagine how this church can be used as an instrument of God's love in many different and new ways in the future. Some of you are good with numbers, some of you show up and weed. Some of you manage details and others dream big dreams.

Some of you play beautiful music that reaches God's ear, some of you faithfully show up to run sound, some of you sit in a basement for hours putting price tags on a million different things for several days in a row, some of you have dedicated your retirement years to feeding the hungry, some of you make and/or send cards, exhorting each other, some of you make sure no one gets left out or forgotten.

Some of you are teachers, some of you cook, some of you organize and plan, some of you make a bee line to a person when they visit our church, some of you just show up and just do what ever needs doing, some of you can't show up right now but continue to contribute with financial support, prayers, and calls to others. You all have made living sacrifices of your lives.

In Paul's time the Roman church needed to hear this metaphor that they all mattered in their own unique way and that it was possible to be different but a part of something bigger than themselves.

There was a lot of in fighting as there often is so these words meant something then and they mean something now. I heard someone quote Dr. King the other day. "We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny." We are different but still blessed by these ties that bind.

And you worship God with your lives, all of your lives. Whether loving your family or neighbor or welcoming a stranger, your lives are the sacrifice which really doesn't feel like a sacrifice at all. For when our lives are pointed in the direction of God we get that peace that passes all understanding. We get that joy, that buzz that comes from being a loving presence in this world to others. It's in this life of loving others that we don't conform to this sometimes hate filled world like Paul said "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God".

That's not easy to do for any of us. It is so easy to get sucked into the yuck and muck of this world. To become driven by things of this world like success and money and appearances. I'm not saying those things are sin, you will rarely hear me use that word but there is a higher plane on which we can live, a spiritual plane in this world that is not of this world, a parallel reality where all judgment gets left behind, where we get to let go and renew our minds.

Now I am all for renewing your minds intellectually, expanding your understandings, listening to others, reading, having an open and ever widening mind but for me renewing my mind is different from expanding my mind.

For me I renew my mind by going to the spirit, by letting go of the things running around in chaos in my mind, letting go of the judgments in my mind, the worries, the anger, the resentments and restoring it's quiet peace.

The only way I have found to do that is explained by the Psalmist. My spiritual routine starts just like this Psalm. I give you thanks, O God with my whole heart. When I feel uncentered, I make a gratitude list of all that is right in my world and the wider world. My list usually sounds like this.

Thank you for my life, for all the love it has in it and I list the sources of that love, Julie and the kids, my parents and family. I give thanks for the people that I have temporarily lost to this world and look forward to seeing in the next, all the people that have taught me, loved me, shaped me, made me.

I give thanks to God for my dog always, for my home and garden, and for pie. I give thanks for my country and its potential of being a more perfect union for all of its people. I give thanks for my education and don't take for granted how lucky I am that I got a good one and how lucky I am to have jobs, healthcare, and a roof over my head... I give thanks for meaningful work, for my faith and I certainly give thanks for each of you.

The second part of my routine goes a little like this hymn "O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder. Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made. I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder Thy power throughout the universe displayed. I ponder all the wonders of creation and I praise God, I let my spirit flow out of me towards God in a personal act of worship.

Somewhere in that process it quits being me just pointing my spirit towards God and becomes more of a connection something that flows between myself and God, a tether of light where I begin to feel like **I have worth, not more or less than anyone else, I begin to feel I have purpose**, I begin to feel joy in the midst of all this trouble and I begin to feel that connection to God's love and God's love for every single being in this world.

How did the psalmist put it, On the day I called,  
you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.  
Now of course this is when I remember to do this, we know that  
the psalmist had some days where all he could do was complain  
to God as do I. But all I have to do is remember, **I am part of  
something much bigger than myself, something so mighty and  
wonderful**, and I am drawn into the beam of the spirit again.  
It is there I find the energy to face head on the problems of this  
world not just crumble in despair, there where I find the courage  
speak out against injustice. There I find my empathy and  
compassion even with people whose actions I don't like.

It is there in communion with God that I am given a reason to get  
up and greet a new day and to find hope. That hope that whispers  
it's going to get better.

May it be so for you, may you feel the ties that bind and know in  
your bones you are an important part of the Body of Christ, may  
you feel the peace, hope, love and connection to the spirit of God  
and may your face shine with it, your eyes twinkle with it and your  
actions say it loudly. AMEN

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I have worth.  
I have purpose.

I am part of something  
much bigger than myself.

REV. SUSAN DRAKE

