

*"Looking to God"*

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First Presbyterian Church  
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**Old Testament Lesson:** Isaiah 2:1-5

**New Testament Lesson:** 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

The theme of the GenOn Youth Summit I attended two weeks ago was "We Are a Church – One Body, One Spirit, One Lord." It was truly amazing to see so many different people from so many different churches representing so many different denominations all come together as one body.

Oh, now it didn't happen right away. But within two days, I started to see it happening. By Day 3, there was no turning back. And by the last two days, we were one body, with Christ as our foundation. The Spirit of the Lord was visible in each and every one of us.

I saw this in the members of the Bible Study I taught. I saw this as the youth from this church – Riley, Seth, and Anna – gradually opened up to Diane, Chris, me as their group leaders and even as friends. I saw this in how our young adults – Jacob, Liam, and Alyssa – stepped up as leaders in their own right, setting a good example, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Being one in the Spirit of Christ is what the Apostle Paul is talking about in his letter to the Corinthians. He says, "Let no one boast about human leaders" – let no one align him- or herself behind one person, over and against another, apart from God.

"For all things are yours," says Paul, "whether (it is) Paul (who leads you in the faith, or Chris Vansandt), or Apollos (or Diane Robertson), or Cephas (or Dave Carlson) ...." No matter who or what you relate to in life, there is only one place to stand as a Christian, and that is on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ.

Whether you're concerned about the world – and who isn't these days – or about "life or death or the present or the future," as Paul says, Paul reminds us that all of it belongs to Christ, all of creation and all of our days are in God's hands.

And further more – and most importantly – if we remain in Christ and Christ in us then we have nothing to worry about! "... You belong to Christ," says Paul, "and Christ belongs to God" – One Body (which is the church), One Spirit (which is our life's force), One Lord (who is our guide and the provider of all we could ever need).

Of course, this all falls apart when we break into different factions, different groups with different interests. One of the hardest things in society today is respecting each other's differences and not demonizing those who have different ideas or want to move at a different pace.

It can be frustrating when people have different approaches to the same problem. It can be challenging when people move at different speeds. I saw this while hiking up a mountain in Estes Park with our group from First Church. There was one point when our little group fell apart. Chris and Liam took one path, while the Vansandt girls, Diane, Jacob, Seth, Riley and I took another.

The reason we went our separate ways is because of how difficult the climb was, lots of loose rocks, slippery pine needles, and dirt crumbling under our feet, all at a 45-degree angle. When life gets that hard or the way forward is that uncertain, the tendency is for us to head off in different directions and at different speeds. The challenge is to hang together no matter what. Because even when we fall apart or go separate ways, we can always come back together, we can always return to the foundation of our faith, our oneness in Christ.

Believe me, coming down that mountain at Estes really tested our faith. So much so, we almost broke into three separate groups. But we didn't. We knew the importance of staying together, no matter what.

And sure enough, about half way down the mountain we joined up with Chris and Liam, and we all made it back as one happy and triumphant group – one body again, thank the Lord.

You know, in monasteries they attach great importance to being one body, and to looking out for one another. According to writer David Steindl-Rast, at mealtime in monasteries when “servers ... bring the food, ... the monks ... are encouraged by the rule of St. Benedict not to ask for anything they need, but always to look out for what a neighbor needs.”

So when one of the monks “... notices as he is eating his soup that a mouse has dropped into his bowl,” what was he to do? He (had) to pay attention to his neighbors' needs, not his own. So he help(ed) himself (and honored the rule) by calling the server and pointing out, ‘My neighbor hasn't got a mouse.’”<sup>1</sup>

There's always a way to have our needs met while also respecting the needs of others. And the best way to do that is to remember what Paul tells us in the first part of today's scripture lesson. Paul says, “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” – in each of us.

When we remember that we are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives and moves in each and every one of us, it's so much easier to respect each other's needs, to value those who are different from us, and to stand as one in our shared love of God and mutual respect for Christ's teaching for the spiritual wisdom we've been given. This doesn't mean we don't get shaken from time to time; we still struggle. The world pulls us in different directions. We get lost in a forest of responsibilities. We get tripped up while struggling to make our way through health or financial or family difficulties. We sink in spirit when there's no good way forward that we can see.

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<sup>1</sup> David Steindl-Rast, *The Music of Silence: Entering the Sacred Space of Monastic Experience* (Harper San Francisco, 1995), 79-80.

Take this year's presidential campaign as an example, or the horrific amount of gun violence these days. Gun violence is out of control. Both of the presidential candidates seem to fall short in the eyes of most voters. Thank God that as Christians, we don't put our faith in either political party, because that's a recipe for disaster – relying solely on human intellect, human emotions apart from God. Thank God that our faith is even stronger than the state of this county or the health of our society. No matter how scary things get, God will see us through, if we would only look to God first and foremost!

Looking to God. This brings us to the home stretch in today's sermon. Ask yourself, where is God in you – in us? Many people think Paul's statement about us being God's temple refers only to our bodies – that we should take care of our bodies because our bodies are God's temple. But that's not what Paul is saying. When Paul says that you are God's temple, Paul means all of you – your intellect, your emotions, your soul or sense of well-being and fulfillment, your dreams and your realities – all belong to God. God lives in and throughout our whole being.

You know it wasn't always this way. Scripture tells us there was a time when God lived separate from the people of Israel. We see this in Genesis 11, where God is in the heavens and the people build a tower to reach him. And in Exodus 20, where God is atop a mountain and the people are terrified to come any closer. In Exodus 25, God lives and moves in a tabernacle, a tent with the people carrying his presence with them on their journey.

It's not until 2 Chronicles 6 that God takes up residence in an actual temple, a brick-and-mortar home for God's presence on earth.

But that's not where God stays, that's not where God is today. In the Gospel According to Mark, chapter 15, the temple veil or curtain is torn and God enters into our lives like never before. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the separation between God and humankind is no more.

No longer is it only the temple priests who have access to God's wisdom and guidance. We are all priests – the priesthood of all believers – responsible for looking to God in all that we say and do, responsible for directing our leaders to preserve and advance the Spirit of Christ's teachings through their decisions and actions.

Knowing that God's Spirit dwells in us, how can we as Christians be anything but One Body (which is the church), One in Spirit (which is our life's force), and One in the Lord (who is our guide and who provides for all our needs).

With faith such as this, we have nothing to fear. With faith such as this, we can truly live for the sake of others, trusting in God to see us through. Amen.

## Pastoral Prayer

You, gracious God, are love itself, and perfect love casts out fear.

Come to us in merciful patience, we pray, to love us from fear to trust, from anger to grace, from doubt to faith.

Love us from our self-centeredness to hearts that willingly give themselves in selfless sacrifice and service.

Love us out of our scarcity to hearts overflowing with generosity.

Love us from brokenness to wholeness, from resentments to forgiveness, freely offered, just as it has been freely given to us through your divine grace and mercy.

In all our struggles and fears, O Lord, overwhelming us with your love and your faith that we might love as you first loved us.

Come to us in this moment, we pray, in the name of Love Incarnate, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to love you and love our neighbor who instructed us in how to do just that through the prayer that he gave to us that we might pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we  
forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**