

OUR PURPOSE

Galatians 3: 26-28; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27; Romans 6: 3-4; Galatians 2: 19-20

To become (in all our brokenness and beauty) **the hands** (what we do), **feet** (where we go), **voice** (what we say) **and heart** (how we love) **of Christ, for each other** (in community) **and in the world** (through outreach, justice, and compassionate care).

1) “To become” means we have not got there yet. We are on the way. But we do need to have some clarity as to where we’re going. And we need to want to get there. The journey with God above, Christ beside and the Spirit within begins when we decide we want to follow Jesus and internalize his Spirit as the force that moves, inspires and powers us.

But are we worthy? Do we have what it takes? Each and every one of us is broken in some way. To be broken means we are not whole. We are on a journey of becoming whole but we are not there yet. Each of us may not be broken in the same way. We don’t need to be fixed as if God has made a mistake in creating us. No. Nothing like that. We need to be empowered to be healed so that the negative currents, the critical voices, the mistakes in our lives, the hurts, the triggers... we need to be healed so that we can love as Christ loves without distraction or blocks or the burdens of guilt or shame. We are becoming as God created us to be... We’re on a journey.

But just as we are broken we are also beautiful, infinitely so. And we are not just beautiful because we tell ourselves we’re beautiful. We are beautiful because God declares us so. The opening chapter of the bible says it clearly: We are “created in God’s image.” God is in us and wants us to recognize God in us. When we look in the mirror, not just the mirror on the wall, but the mirror that reflects what is inside us, we need to see that infinite beauty has been planted in us and like any seed, it needs to grow in order to flower. We are beautiful and on a journey of becoming so that we grow in our potential to shine that beauty outwards without shame. As we are being healed of our brokenness, our beauty is becoming free to rise up and shine more and more. We are becoming...

2) OK, so what are we becoming exactly? We are becoming “the hands, feet, voice and heart of Christ.” In biblical times, people encountered the Christ of God as embodied in the human Jesus. Jesus is our picture of God, God’s will and God’s heart. But as Jesus dies and rises up to reign with God, we his disciples are now called to embody him so that his healing and transforming presence spreads out into the world. We are the frontlines of God’s kingdom, planting seeds and building deep roots for the kingdom of love to grow against all that diminishes and destroys the life of God’s good creation. Every time we go, we do, we speak, we listen, we are present, we support, we stand up... every time we love like Jesus loved... Every time we shine in our God-

given beauty of heart and spirit past our brokenness... Every time our brokenness becoming healing reflects our courage and grace, encouraging others to find hope in their brokenness in search of healing... every time this happens, Christ is moving in the world through the flow of his Spirit... We are his hands, feet, voice and heart if we embrace this calling to becoming for ourselves... Do you want to become in Christ?...

3) But are we just individual agents of Christ? Or are we in this together supporting and encouraging one another as fellow travellers on our journey of becoming? We are together for each other just as much as we are also individually in our own personal lives the hands, feet, voice and heart of Christ. We are for each other building community and for the world in the various opportunities and possibilities that come our way. We need each other because we are stronger together and we are stronger when empowered in community than just by ourselves alone. And yet, even as we are together, we also live our own lives, within our own relationships and possibilities... We have our own histories, families, friends and communities... and yet, we are also embracing this purpose together as this community...

Now, let's dig into parts of this statement as we explore a few biblical passages. I have chosen readings from the apostle Paul as he zeros in on this imagery in a more mystical and first person way. Paul reflects the rest of the New Testament in terms of what we are called to become, but Paul is more explicit about this transformation from Christ being outside us, to Christ becoming more intimately within us. In theological language we call this: incorporation or participation. We are incorporated into Christ and we participate in Christ. The great biblical scholar on Paul - Michael Gorman - calls the language Paul uses: "liquid metaphor." It's the language of flow, of in and out. Even as we each have our own distinctive identities, "in" Christ we are also being transfigured so that Christ becomes in us.

Let's explore this a little more through our scripture readings. Our first reading:

Galatians 3. 26-28

²⁶For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

What gorgeous imagery... We are baptized into Christ... We are clothing ourselves with Christ... What does this mean? It means we are being called into a new identity. It doesn't mean we give up all that makes us different and distinctive – our culture, our gender, where we come from, our likes and dislikes and all that makes us who we are... no. But in Paul's world, differences matter in terms of where people fit in on the status scale. Jews hate Greeks and think of them as impure outsiders. Greeks hate Jews and think of them as lesser humans. To be free or enslaved represents a massive wall of difference in terms of your status and privilege in the world. To be

male or female represents a massive difference in social power. In our world, we could just as well add differences of colour. Are you black or white, indigenous or settler? Are you cis-gendered, non-binary or transitioning? Paul is arguing that “in Christ” we all enter into a new identity where our differences don’t make us better or worse, higher or lower... We are all infinitely precious, beautiful and astonishing. Our new identity trumps our old identity, especially if our old identity makes us feel less than the infinitely beautiful creatures God made us to be in all our distinctiveness.

And to build on this, let’s listen to our second reading:

1 Corinthians 12. 12-27

12 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. ¹³For 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.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If 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. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The 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.’ ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The opening verses reflect what we heard in our first reading. We are baptized into Christ. But now we also have some additional imagery: the body. Through the Spirit of Christ, we’re told, we are all baptized into his body... Christ is the head and we are, together, his hands, feet, voice and heart... Paul calls each of us “members” of Christ’s body. And he makes several very important points. Once again, he emphasizes that even though out there in the world, differences separate us and make some of us feel less than or more than others, “in” Christ we are all equally valued and precious. Christ’s body is incomplete without all of us “members” being part of it.

Second, Paul is emphasizing that our differences are still important. We can't all be hands or feet or all this or all that. We need the full diversity of who we are to make the whole body function properly. Who you are as an individual person with all that makes you distinct matters. But rather than feel self-conscious or ashamed or that somehow you are less than others, in Christ and in your new identity as incorporated in Christ, you can grow and flourish ever more fully so that the distinctive "you" shines ever more brightly. We are here to celebrate each other in all our uniqueness. That's what gives us power to be who we are and then go back out there into the world to shine more brightly as the heart of Christ wherever we go, whatever we do, whatever we say and however we are present where it matters... If you do not feel that much more loved in all that makes you uniquely "you" here, this community is not functioning as the body of Christ.

Finally, what gives us strength and grows us together as a body is that we are there for each other to celebrate each other even as we are also there for each other to support each other in our hurts and losses... We rejoice with one another and weep with one another too. Where else do we find such beautiful togetherness than "in" Christ?

But there's more to this imagery. Our final two readings image baptism as the beginning of a journey through death to resurrection...

Romans 6. 3-4

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of our Abba God, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Galatians 2. 19-20

¹⁹I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

From death to resurrection... What happened to Jesus was terrible. Crucifixion is an awful way to die. The purpose was not only to destroy Jesus in a most cruel and humiliating way possible. It was also to destroy his kingdom movement. But what happens instead? Somehow, his death unleashes his Spirit in a much more transforming way. Rather than crush Jesus, his death releases his Spirit into his followers and through them into ever widening ripples of empowered, loving relationships. Instead of disappearing, Jesus rises as Christ and through his Spirit. He then moves as Spirit through wind and fire (Pentecost) and hearts, powering previously fearful and spiritually crippled humans into courageously compassionate and gratefully liberated persons, coming together to build community. And so, the language of death and resurrection now becomes an

important marker of moving out of something, letting go all that shames and diminishes us, and rising up to a new identity and new way of being.

From the dying and rising in the moment of baptism, to the dying and rising after we take our last breaths in this life and transitioning into the next, our becoming is a constant series of dyings and risings so that Christ becomes more fully in us and all that makes us shine in ourselves becomes that much brighter. We discover who we are truly made to be as we grow in our Christ identity...

So, where does this leave each of us here? Does the image of Christ's body growing, expanding and spreading as each of us is incorporated into it inspire you, call to you, stir in you? Does living in Christ evoke strong feelings of empowerment to love in you? Does it fill you with faith and hope to live your life and face your challenges with courage and grace because you are never on your own? Does it give you a deeper sense of joy and commitment becoming part of this communion of Christ's body here at Armour Heights?

We need each other even as we need power to live our own lives. May God, in Christ, through his Spirit move among us, between us and through us out into the world... Our world needs all the healing Christ-love it can get, especially now. May this be your purpose at this time of your life? May it be my purpose. And, may it be our purpose, together! Amen.