

## Building Up the Body of Christ

When it comes to a project or event, are you an organizer, a “do-er”, or some combination of the two? Now, would you rather be the leader of a project or one of the followers or assistants? Maybe you have changed over the years and moved from do-er to organizer/leader or, have become someone who does a bit to assist with a project. A few who have reached a “certain age” may have abdicated their roles to watch and encourage from the sidelines.

Our roles do change, and even Jesus found himself in new positions as his ministry began. Depending on their audience and theme, the Gospels tell us the scenario or event that signifies the start of Jesus’ ministry. In today’s reading from Luke, we see Jesus taking on what appears to be a new role as a teacher within the synagogue. Scripture scholars will tell us that this event is also told in Mark’s Gospel, but in a shorter version. We know that Mark’s Gospel is the shortest while Luke’s Gospel is the longest. In John’s Gospel last week, Jesus changes water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. This passage only appears in John’s Gospel, which was written about thirty to forty years after

Luke's, and didn't feel compelled to share that same story. Nonetheless, we have the origins of Jesus' ministry.

As sometimes is the case, when we hear from a local person who takes on the role of teacher, leader, or organizer, we may stare at them in bewilderment. "Hey, isn't that the kid who used to run out the door when it was time to go to church school?" "Isn't she the one who cried during the pageant because her star fell?" It is pretty much how the first hearer's in that synagogue felt. First of all, here is the "carpenter's son" sitting in the teacher's chair. By the way, that act alone was of great significance. Unlike most preachers today who stand at a pulpit or in the aisles, the person called upon to teach sat in that chair of authority. Here, Jesus gave his message, much to the astonishment of those in attendance.

The reader may be invited by the synagogue elder or leader to provide a commentary. Jesus begins with a zinger, and something much more than a zinger – a sentence that remains fresh and provocative down to our own time. Jesus sets free the scripture passage he has just read; he lets the lion out of its cage; he overthrows the ho-hum expectations of

the people around him. Here is what he says: Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was not afraid to tell the synagogue and Temple (big “T” for *the* Temple in Jerusalem) leaders about what it should mean to follow their faith. It happens even today. Not everyone is happy with a particular sermon that someone gives or with what someone says on a particular occasion. But, as people who profess to be followers of Jesus, the Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, there are some hard things that we, too, have to follow.

If we get stuck as we wonder how to be a follower of Jesus, or how to lead other followers, Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians to remind us

1. Some people have gifts that were given by the Holy Spirit
2. Recognize and use your gifts
3. Know that your gifts cannot be used without the participation of others.

The metaphorical language used by Paul reminds us that all of us, regardless of our roles, be it leaders, organizers, followers, sideliners, or

supporters, make up this body of Christ. For me, this is why we come to worship with others. It is pretty wild that in 2025 we can apply a message that we believe was written almost 2000 years ago.

Scholars tell us that the first letter to the church in Corinth was written around 53-54 AD. Paul wrote this in response to questions that had been asked and as a means to deal with dissension and arguments among the followers of “The Way” with the Corinthians.

Here are some questions for us, depending on where you live and where you worship. Do we have dissension among followers of “The Way” in 2025 in the United States? In Massachusetts? In Westfield? In Southwick? At First Congregational Church? At Southwick Congregational Church? Many of us don’t know the answers because we haven’t had conversations YET to figure that out. We have members who make up the Body of Christ at both churches. Our members come from different backgrounds, political affiliations, different philosophical beliefs, etc. But together we still make up the Body of Christ.

We don’t know in what ways we will be called upon to act as the Body of Christ. There are a few things that we have to remember. First

of all, we open worship at both churches by saying, “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” That has to go for everyone, whether or not you agree with what they say. As your pastor, I have vowed that I will only and always preach the Gospel based on what readings come before us or what I prayerfully believe that our community needs to hear based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We pray that the Spirit of the Lord will be upon each one of us as we continue to practice our faith to build up and be the Body of Christ in Westfield, Southwick, and to those around us. We pray that whatever gifts the Holy Spirit has given to each of us will be used for the sole purpose of building up the Body of Christ so that the Kingdom or Reign of God on earth will happen. In words that are sometimes attributed to Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.” As your spiritual pastor, teacher, shepherd, and guide, I am here for all members of both churches as well as the communities as needed and necessary.