

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church & Neighborhood House  
Excerpts from Worship  
January 17, 2010

Call to Worship

One: We are the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, all of it - God.

Many: It is through us that God works. Yes, through each one of us.

One: Through us, God brings to life more light than we can imagine.

Many: It's true. When we reach out as one, together, the world – yes, even the universe – brightens and changes.

One: We are in the light of the presence of God; we *are* the light and presence of God; it is through us that God revealed to the world.

Many: Let this body, this collective body, reach out to all those who gather here and elsewhere on this day – in prayer, praise, and song. Let us raise our voices and hearts – and then let God raise them even more. Come, let us be one and worship God together. Amen.

Unison Prayer:

In Christ and God as you may know God, we meet east and west, north and south – the boundaries, that were never there to start, are gone again. We find ourselves in the center – of the center, filled with the promise and hope that could only be ours through the risen Jesus, here with us and in us now. There is nothing too great that cannot be overcome, for the greatest of all human fears has been conquered and scattered into the four winds by the Christ, gone, just as the winds are gone. Throughout the whole wide earth, we are one – and we are blessed and ready for what we are called to do. Prepare ye...to be amazed!  
Amen.

First Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

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 would 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 would 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 honor, 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 honor 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.

Gospel Reading: Luke 4:14-21

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

*Sermon:* "One Together: It is the Higher Power"  
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Sermon Notes:

During the week, I had reason to accompany a member of our community to the Emergency Room at New York Presbyterian Hospital. Like so many others, this person had sought answers for in the abuse of drugs and alcohol – only to find none were there. They were ready to make a change and asked for help. They agreed to go to detox, were fortunate enough to have Medicare and Medicaid, and so we walked over to the ER at 68<sup>th</sup> and York, where the person was welcomed and admitted.

During the intake process, I sat in the waiting room. I could see from where I was seated that the person had been accepted and had moved to a different area. I was finished there, but I didn't leave right away. I just found myself sitting – in the waiting room.

It dawned on me that I had been there for some time. That thought made me wonder why. I'd worked in hospitals, ER Rooms, in fact, before. So it wasn't the novelty of being there. Nor was it a sense that I wanted to reconnect with anything that I knew of. It occurred to me that the reason I stayed was that it was a "Waiting Room" and I didn't necessarily need a purpose to "wait" in a room that was designated for that very reason.

That was going nowhere. So. I got up and left, walking 10 or so blocks north and finally stopping in a diner to get something to eat.

It wasn't until this morning that I think I figured out why I sat. It's the same reason that I wander in here sometimes, when no one is around and sit. It's that sometimes you just need to stop and be still. From a busy day, a long project, a full day of volunteers, or taking someone to detox.

It occurred to me that we are supposed to be "arrested" – stopped when we enter into the space of someone's life, especially at the critical times. Such a time is not another appointment on an itinerary to be checked off, moving onto what is next. In fact, these types of things happen mostly without warning and are often filled with "coincidences," i.e. God's way of being anonymous. The only decision to make is if you will say "Yes" to who or what God has placed before you.

This entering into someone's life is pretty mystical stuff, when you think about it. It's filled with all sorts of currents of trust, vulnerability, hope, expectation, skepticism, and the beyond. It is an imperfect art in terms of being predictable and, at the same time, a totally possible thing to do – simply by being present.

I am happy that the person went into detox, and I hope it is their last time. However, whether or not it sticks for them this time around, I was present, and I prayed. It was all I could do, at the time.

Additionally, what I would say, is that at that moment, I was exactly where I was supposed to be. What if everyone one of us were here and we all gathered around this person, we all made the calls, dozens of times, walked in a long parade to 68<sup>th</sup> and York, sat together – waiting. No, in whatever it is we were doing – each in our own place at that moment – we each had the chance to be present in our own circumstances, say “Yes,” and be right where we were supposed to be.

Together, in all those different places, present in all those different ways, together we were a higher power compared to what we are by ourselves. Together, in our extended locations, we formed a web of spirit, presence, and prayer that formed us into a body and action – in our tradition we call it The Body of Christ. In Hinduism, it might be called the Atman. In Buddhism it might be the Enlightenment, being empty of independent experience, in rooms of twelve-step recovery: it is often referred to as fellowship. Early Christians knew it as the ecclesia.

It is the ontological relationship in metaphysics that connects us in all the ways we are connected. More, it is the engine before the science, the presence before language, it is what John refers to as “In the beginning...” and what was before...what is now and future.

Anyone looking for work, and there are many of us who have in the last several years been told the secret to getting hired – as if it was a recent discovery – network! Well, just as Einstein discovered the formula that was there long before he noticed it ( $E=mc^2$ ); Paul is encouraging the early Christians to recognize the “network” they are already connected to, acknowledging and affirming how each of their gifts is important and part of the great Body of Christ in the Greater Body of God.

Paul might have said: “There is no less than and no more than. We are all of the same thing. All of what and who we are is blessed and part of. No one is left out, nor should you leave anyone out... alone... marginalized... or disenfranchised – for when you do: you leave out the Christ. As Jesus is reported to have said, “What you do to the least of my brethren – you do to me!”

Simple.

Paul is adding – and what you do to one another: you do to yourself.

Be unto others as you would have them be unto you.

We are all connected.

Yesterday, I managed to squeeze in a portion of a lecture given by Dr. James Alison a Catholic Priest, theologian and author, noted for his work on gay issues and the Roman Catholic church. He talks about an anthropological earthquake (an odd sort of metaphor considering the events of the last few weeks) that is happening in terms of the growing body of people who are openly LGBT. What he never got to or never seemed to be addressing are the injured or lost people that occur in any earthquake. He may very well be correct that in time all the conflicts surrounding people who are LGBT will be worked out and a distant memory – but I am afraid neither that nor triage, alone or in the meantime, is enough for me. When one member of the Body is hurting – I don't believe that healing is a passive response. If it were the miracles of science would never have been discovered and the demands for justice would just be echoes, irritating, mosquito-like echoes, brushed away or simply tolerated.

Paul seems to be having none of it. And neither is Jesus, according to Luke:

“Then Jesus, filled with the power of the spirit returned...  
The Spirit of the Lord (of God) is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year (the time) of God's favor.”

And he caught their attention. Their eyes were fixed upon him.

“today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

In other words, let those with eyes see, those with ears hear, and those with voices use them!

This is not a passive, let's wait and give everybody a chance to come around to health care approach by any means.

This is Luke and Paul and Jesus together affirming the power of the followers of Jesus and God and shaking things up; paying attention to what is; taking action; challenging others to do the same; and insisting that we be satisfied with nothing less than release of the captives and the oppressed – and a return to wholeness; i.e. God.

Jesus stopped them in their tracks. He has been doing that ever since. Yes, it is easier to check one thing after another off a list and just keep going. But that is not the deal. We are supposed to be stopped in our tracks by injustice, oppression, and the needs of others.

And we know this is true. Everyone here was frozen in one way or another to the news of the earthquake in Haiti. But unlike the news that reports and moves on eventually, we have stopped and are taking actions to move in a direction that combines with our prayer, presence, and resources – our eyes, ears, and voices – and all our talents to help – because we are not sorry about what happened, feeling bad or pity for what happened, or any other sentiment that may linger – we are committed to helping our sisters and brothers in Haiti because they **are** our sisters and brothers and we are all of one family, one God, and through us God is a real and accessible higher power that is available. God is our “Hope for Haiti” and all else.

So, in all things be still and know God, and let us find the “Higher Power” in our work together. Join us today and as we go forward in our work as sisters and brothers to help those in Haiti and all those oppressed, marginalized, or otherwise in need of the members of the body, in which we all share.

Today, as before, these things are fulfilled in what we do, and let it all be witness to the power of prayer, presence, and action of the God in us and all that is around us.