Called to be the Body
Luke 4: 14-21; 1Corinthians 12:12-31a

"Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, ...yours are the eyes, you are His Body. Christ has no body now, but yours." These are the words of Teresa of Avila. Hers is a reflection of the teachings of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1Cor. 12:27) We are called to be the body. We are called to be in service.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians makes clear that each part of the body has its own unique purpose. No one part can claim superiority over the other, but they all serve a purpose unto themselves yet are to come together to form the whole body of Christ. Individually and collectively, we have been gifted with the Holy Spirit, present in our lives from our birth and at our baptism. As a family of faith we are called to share the gifts, graces, and talents we have been given with one another such that we help to end suffering and share in the love of God as the whole body of Christ.

Bishop Desmond Tutu states it this way, "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." In essence, "I am, because you are." (African Proverb) "We are all equal contributors to the [body] of God. Our contribution is not impaired or improved by our function. However, the body's functionality is impaired or improved by our ability to know our function [or purpose] and to add to the work of the Kin-dom accordingly. Whatever God has called us to do within the life of the church and the world, we have [both an individual and a collective purpose.]"[1]

In our gospel reading from Luke, Jesus shares his purpose for the world and therefore our collective purpose for the world. In the synagogue Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah 61:1,2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because [the Spirit] has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. [The Spirit] has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed"(Luke 4:18) As individuals stare at him after

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[1] Michael Lomax, Guest Lectionary Commentator Associate Pastor, Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church, Nashville, TN; http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org/

having gone and sat down, he then said to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21) Jesus, shared with those gathered in the synagogue his purpose not only for their lives, but also for our lives TODAY.

Today, my sisters and brothers of Peace we are called to be collectively the hands, eyes, ears, feet, and voice of God. We are not to withhold our gifts from service to be used "later," but we are called to use them TODAY. We have been gifted with the Holy Spirit. We are called individually and collectively to share the good news of God's love, God's forgiveness, God's presence, and salvation with the poor. Poverty goes beyond our finances, however. Within our language and our culture we acknowledge that poverty or being poor is also a reflection of the many different situations we might find ourselves in. We are impoverished when we live our lives such that they cause harm to another human being as in "he is a poor excuse of a human being." We acknowledge the poverty of spirit that may exist in mothers and wives when they have to bury a child or their spouse saying "that poor woman." We turn on our televisions and we look upon the lost and wondering faces of our sisters and brothers in Haiti and we say "those poor people." When we do not schedule in time weekly to go to God in prayer, to read scripture, and to be in community we, too, become poor.

On yesterday members of our Peace Church family participated in the Touched Twice clinic with me in Rapids. We saw individuals and families who were financially struggling, but also those who found themselves poor in spirit as a consequence of their circumstances and for some it was as a consequence of never having been a part of a family of faith. Those of us who were a part of the evangelism and prayer teams would gather together and pray even for those who said they did not want individual prayer, but had just shared with the advocate the laundry list of their losses and needs. Lost jobs, homelessness, deaths in their families, health concerns. Individuals who seemingly could not see the hope or provision found in "taking it to the Lord in prayer." As members of the body of Christ who know that it is God who says we are to pray without ceasing, we are to ask trusting that our needs will be meet and it will be given unto us… as the members of Christ's body called to stand trusting in the power of prayer when our sisters and brothers could not, we interceded on their behalf and prayed. At times the depth of our needs leaves us feeling bankrupt, empty and as though we must carry our burdens alone. We become captives and oppressed, blinded to God's will and God's presence in our lives.

We can be captive, oppressed and blinded not only by our circumstance, but also by the choices we make. Can't we? We are captive to our favorite television program that dictates our availability on a certain night of the week. In today's economic environment many find themselves captive to their jobs out of fear of losing them and the potential lack of provision should that happen. We are captive to what others think of us sometimes at a cost to our health and the well being of our family. My dearest friend and I talked at length last week about the possible end to her 21 years or so of marriage because her husband has become captive to what people at work and others think of him for gaining weight and all the changes that come with being a 40 something. She shared with me as they were arguing one evening and had resolved that divorce was inevitable for the 2 of them that she said to him, "You have told me that you want to lose weight, regain your strength, and look better because of what people at your job think, but not once in the hours that we have been arguing have you mentioned me or your daughter. Not once have you mentioned why your family is important to you, it's just what other people will think." We are held captive such that we are blinded to the things in life that really matter. We are blinded to the will of God for our lives and our value as children of God.

Being a people of faith requires something of us. We are called to cultivate and nurture our relationship with God so that we are able to individually and communally join together as the whole body of Christ and not just parts. Our words and our actions are to be a reflection of our faith in sharing the Good News of God's love and God's presence with the world. It is in our praying, caring, and doing, that those who find themselves blind, captive, and oppressed by their circumstances, their thoughts, and actions can find their sight again and their freedom. We should be asking one another the questions, "How is your prayer life, or "Have you made time for God in your life?" As the body of faith we are to call our sisters and brothers when they are absent from church just to say, "Hello, I have been thinking about you." We can give voice to the gifts and graces we see that others possess. Let us name for one another what is so obvious to us, but not necessarily to the one who has been gifted. For example the gift of compassion, the gift of listening, the gift of presence, the gift of problem solving. In having our gifts named for us we are affirmed and our community is strengthened when we can more clearly see God's presence in our lives. "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." (Desmond Tutu)

We have been gifted with the same Holy Spirit. Today we are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Today we are called as the body of Christ to share the Good News with the poor, offer release to those captive and oppressed, and give sight to the blind. “Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, ...yours are the eyes, you are His Body. Christ has no body now, but yours.” (Teresa of Avila) Amen.