

Liturgy on Being One Body

“Lord, release the chains, set me free!”

A = all

C1 = complainer 1

C2 = complainer 2

P = pastor or liturgist

R1 = reader 1

R2 = reader 2

R3 = reader 3

INTRODUCTORY WORDS

P: What you do to another, you do to yourself and to all of us. In the deepest sense, we are one person, a universal body.
When we destroy another person, we also destroy something within ourselves, and as a consequence, something in humanity.
But this does not mean that we humans are all alike. There is great diversity among us, in the same way that diversity exists within each and every one of us.

COMPLAINT. C1 and 2: From the back of the sanctuary.

A: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?”

C1: *“It is as though people avoid me, talk behind my back, they treat me like I’m different.”*
“They think of me as being a loser, I’m excluded.”

C2: *“I don’t dare tell anyone that I’m HIV positive, because I don’t know how others will react.”*

C1: *“I’m so sick and tired of all the questions! It’s a human need to have intimacy; I have needs too, the desire to have children, the desire to have a husband.”*

C2: *“Some people see only the virus, they don’t see me!”*

C1: *“I’m so afraid of being rejected or disappointed. I don’t dare to fall in love.”*

C2: *“Why does it seem like God is angry when I try to do my best?”*

C1: *“I have searched for a God who loves me, who doesn’t judge and who can help me to accept HIV and to be free from condemnation. I didn’t find him in the church. It has been a lonesome search.”*

A: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?”

CONFESSION OF PARTICIPATION IN WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIVE. From the chancel:

R1: We confess that we are a part of all that God has created and he saw that it was “very good,” that we all have a part in the good and bear within ourselves a basic goodness. We confess that all our being, also our physical body, our longings and desires are all a part of God’s image within us.
We confess that we all have value, and that we have value because we are God’s creation, because we live and exist.

SILENCE OR SONG

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN WHAT IS DESTRUCTIVE. From either side of the front of the sanctuary:

R2: We acknowledge our part in creating divisions and placing some people on the outside.
We acknowledge our prejudices, that we fear what is foreign to us and that we contribute to people’s feelings of isolation, being shunned and treated as though they were different.
We acknowledge that we are often more concerned about a person’s status and their being different than we are about their inner resources, potential and common humanity.
We acknowledge that we often identify certain people or groups of people as being evil, and that we do not see that we are all a part of what is evil as well as what is good.
We acknowledge injustice in that the strongest, the healthiest and the wealthiest among us are often prioritized, receive the best and in that way receive even more.

Look upon us in mercy, forgive us, cleanse us and make us whole.

SILENCE OR SONG

CONFESSION OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY. From the other side of the front of the sanctuary:

R3: We confess our part in being hurt and injured, naked and exposed.
We confess one mutual humanity, where none stands above or beneath, or are better or worse than others.
We confess that we are part of diversity, of varieties and variations, which are all part of one and the same humanity; that we are members of one and the same body, in one and the same church
- where the last are the first and where power belongs to the lowest.

ABSOLUTION:

P: You are loved, far more than you know – loved, forgiven and redeemed.
And this love sustains your life. Your deepest identity IS love.

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 13:10-17

CONFESSION OF FAITH:

We believe in a God who IS love; who created us in love; who suffers when we suffer, and who is actively at work in the world for good.

We believe in a God who does not send disease or other suffering as punishment for sin.

We believe in Jesus Christ, who took upon himself our flesh and blood; who reveals to us what God is like; who put people above laws and regulations; who cleanses us and sets us free to follow the way of love.

We believe in the notion that Jesus Christ can not be owned or controlled by anyone nor that he can be limited by laws and rules.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the power who gives life; the breath who gives life and transforms our bodies into a place where heaven and earth can meet.

We believe in a Spirit who does not remove us from our bodies, the earth and life, or who makes some people better believers than others.

We believe that we make up the church and that together we are a colorful fellowship; in this church no one is, per definition, placed outside; in this church people find help to accept and love themselves and their neighbor.

We believe in a church that does not stigmatize, discriminate, exclude or condemn anyone.

We believe, God. Help our unbelief.

MEDITATION ON THE TEXT

In Luke 13:10-17 we come face to face with a God who opposes the authorities and loosens the chains of people who are bound. It is a God who is not only active during business hours from 9 to 5, i.e. within a certain framework, but as a force that will not be confined or limited. God himself breaks the rules of Scripture because people and compassion are more important than laws. *The intention* of the law is more important than obedience to individual laws.

God's nature is love, and the purpose behind his words and actions is to loosen bonds, to lift up the downtrodden, and to make people free; God heals and saves.

This episode and other central stories about Jesus can help remove notions of God characterized by aggression, revenge and punishment and instead point to the very core of the gospel—God's love for each and every one of us.

Christianity and the gospel have potential that at times appear to be totally untapped. They can be fantastic tools for our lives; they can set us free and cleanse us from everything in ourselves and our surroundings that suppress the individual. They do away with a fragmented view of humanity, which creates guilt and shame and which holds one down. It emphasizes the importance of having love for oneself and for one's neighbor.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

- God of all people, give us the strength and courage to recognize and work against every form of stigmatization, exclusion and discrimination. Help us to work against prejudice, and give us the ability to recognize your presence in every person. In our

- hearts we lay before you those whom we know personally who experience what it is like to be placed on the outside.
- God of love, reveal yourself to us and help us to witness to you in truth. Free us from the temptation to misuse you in order to take advantage of other people, or to be served rather than to serve. Help us to share the love you bring to us and to work against destructive notions of you.
 - God, the source of all life and vitality, help us to look after ourselves, our lives and each other. Give us courage and strength to oppose disparagement, discrimination and violation of women, and to put an end to the violence that occurs both within and outside of marriage. Help us always to care for those much less fortunate than ourselves, and to speak about HIV in language characterized by respect, love, forgiveness and intimacy.
 - Triune God, make our congregations places for inclusive fellowship and diversity, where our variety of experiences may find recognition and the value of each individual find affirmation. Help us to be what we deep down already are: members of one and the same body. Enable us to see the individual ahead of laws, viruses or sickness. We pray for a church that can make life beautiful and possible for us all, that can be a welcoming committee for your healing powers in the world.

BENEDICTION AND DISMISSAL

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you his peace.

Go in peace:
in pride and in joy;
in the knowledge that you are loved;
in the knowledge that you always and in all places are part of the body of Christ.
Go in peace and serve the Lord of Life.