**Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8**  
8:1 all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel.  
  
8:2 Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month.  
  
8:3 He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.  
  
8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.  
  
8:6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.  
  
8:8 So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.  
  
  
**1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**  
12:12 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.  
  
12:13 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.  
  
12:14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.  
  
12:15 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.  
  
12:16 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.  
  
12:17 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?  
  
12:18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.  
  
12:19 If all were a single member, where would the body be?  
  
12:20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body.  
  
12:21 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."  
  
12:22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,  
  
12:23 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;  
  
12:24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,  
  
12:25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.  
  
12:26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.  
  
12:27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.  
  
12:28 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.  
  
12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?  
  
12:30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?  
  
12:31 But strive for the greater gifts.  
  
**Luke 4:14-21**  
4:14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.  
  
4:15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.  
  
4:16 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,  
  
4:17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:  
  
4:18 "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,  
  
4:19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."  
  
4:20 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.  
  
4:21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

“Learning Modalities”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

January 23, 2022

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In January of 2019, I had my umpteenth concussion. It was eventually something I was grateful for, but not for months. The lesson it taught me about how some of my students learn—and about how some of them can’t learn—is one of the things that I took from that time that is a positive. I am a fortunate person educationally for many reasons, the first of which is that I grew up in a town with a truly excellent school system, with few teachers I would say were anything but very good. We may not look back at the 60s and 70s and think of them as a pinnacle of educational advancement or innovation—I do still remember film strips, after all—but for my part, I remember being engaged, stimulated by the subject matter, usually, and that I had a variety of kinds of opportunities to make material stick. The other fortunate part of my education is knowing that I learn well in a variety of ways. When I hit my head the most recent time, I couldn’t rely on aural learning; I couldn’t simply hear something and remember it as I used to. Likewise, I couldn’t simply read something on paper and then know how it would look in three dimensions. I had to *move* more so that I would *think* less.

When I became a teacher, I know that I leaned heavily on ways of learning that were *most* comfortable for me; most engaging for the ways that I learn. For a quick review of what some of you may intuitively know and the educators among you may know more concretely, there are a lot of learning styles, different modalities: We speak regularly these days aboutthose learners who are moreVisual, Auditory, Written, Experiential/Kinesthetic (they need to *do* to make things stick), or Multimodal learners (those who not only flourish, but need different ways of learning, to have material become real and have lasting importance), and as a teacher I sought to create lesson plans that met a variety of needs. That said, I know that I missed engaging some of my students some of the time, and other students at other times. While classroom time was often active and participatory, my assessments—those things I asked of my students to let them show me what they knew—tended to be written essays on one hand, and tests that asked for more factual and linear details on the other. It was often only in getting up and moving that some of my kids learned anything at all, and that is a hard way to fashion a “test.” Asking someone to learn something and then asking them to act upon or act out that learning are two different things.

What got me to thinking about all of this in preparation for this morning is, of course, Paul’s description of the Body of Christ being made up of many members, but also has me thinking about the kind of “classroom settings” in which God’s people have learned the lessons of our faith and in which we have been asked to respond to those lessons.

Imagine the scene in the passage from Nehemiah. For my part, I can’t help but think of the grand cathedrals in which the pastor or priest speaks from a highly elevated pulpit, somehow staring down on the people. That image is certainly part of the reason I like preaching more casually, whether here at my dining room table or from the floor of the sanctuary, at eye level. From there, maybe, quoting from Nehemiah, one is to “[give] the sense, so that the people [understand] the reading.” That was Ezra’s role in the passage we heard this morning. Some of the people need interpretation. We all do; not just to hear the lesson but also to ponder it in some way before it sticks. I chose not to spend time on the several verses that follow in Nehemiah, in which the people are tearful and are somehow in mourning after hearing the Law spoken, because our particular response to God’s will for us is, in some way, not what I would like us to focus on today, though of course overall that is the goal—interpretation and understanding.

I would like us to imagine what it is like to hear only preaching, and not be asked to engage; to be spoken to without being asked to speak or to do. Do you remember when you were a student, even this morning, what it would be if I just woke at you, or BJ only read at you, and there was no opportunity in the rest of our lives to live out what it is we are learning; to test out what it would be to make it stick? Jesus’ first sermon, what we hear in the Gospel lesson, can ask us to consider similarly. Jesus offers good news, amazing news, and the first response people have to the words is just that: amazement, and great approval. After all, Jesus is proclaiming Jubilee—the year of the Lord’s favor! This is the scripture lesson that draws Jesus’ sermon in verses 22-30. He carries on with the interpretation and teaching of scripture that we saw first in our passage from Nehemiah. So, thus far in this chapter, all that he shares apparently is good news to his hearers. We’ll leave a cliff hanger, which as you’ll see if you come to worship next week is aptly named a “cliff hanger,” and what may be our response to what Jesus says: that this is the year of the Lord’s favor, the Jubilee in which the blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the oppressed will go free. And then he closes, with “this is fulfilled in your hearing.” Oh, somehow in Jesus?

One way of wondering how we respond to Jesus’ words for us is to ask how we would literally respond. Maybe you are someone who can’t simply hear the words but needs to see the words’ truth enacted. So, you *hear* this word of good news, but you haven’t seen it yet and so you haven’t learned that lesson. The chapters that follow this one in Luke reveal Jesus’ healing ministries. Jesus does not simply *say* that the prophecy is fulfilled. He fulfills the prophecy by healing the demon-possessed, the sick and paralyzed, lepers, hemorrhaging women, and by welcoming tax collectors and sinners. For some of us who are trying to learn how to be disciples, we learn better what Jesus means when *hearing* what he speaks, by *seeing* what he *does*. Then, there are those among us who will not learn anything very well unless and until we *do*, ourselves.

Paul reminds us that there is no one right person to do the work of faithful living. Each of us is gifted with different gifts of the Spirit, with different learning and doing styles, each of which is equally important in the Body of Christ. Without any one of our gifts, the Church is less; the world is less. As those who claim to follow the teachings of Jesus, whose work is part of God’s saving Grace, we aren’t asked to follow a single path. Thank goodness I don’t have to do the same things as any one of you to live faithfully. Yes, some of them, but we are going to understand them differently. Our learning and our doing won’t all happen on the same timeline or with equally measurable “success.” Still, we keep in our hearts, minds and spirits, a goal of creating as significant a slice of the reign of God that we are able to create, together. One step toward this is learning from scripture what a good life looks like for everyone. We read, we are taught, we learn, and we act—in response to all the texts that we heard today. Some of us will understand it best in different ways, through different modalities. If we feel like we “don’t get it,” we might try a new way. You have those opportunities here and our roles in these opportunities are varied: some organize best (I am so grateful for those people, knowing it is not a strength of mine!), some teach best, some want to act out in order to understand and manifest their gifts. The same message runs through all of these words, however: Good news for the poor and freedom/release from what keeps us captivated to sin, that is, captivated by those things that harm our relationships with each other and with God.

This church—and by that I mean all its members, its committees and its activities—is trying to be a part of God’s loving reign and to bring this kin-dom to others. We are *all* one Body in humanity, and when we say that we are Christians, we say that we welcome others as Jesus would and did—openly, lovingly, without judgment. And so, in order to make some of our faith beliefs understandable in practice, some of our members are working together to support Afghan refugees here in Maine, trying to make it possible for us to receive more Afghan refugees; some of our members are knitting and crocheting together to create symbolic and physical warmth in the form of prayer shawls for hurting members of our community; some are researching how best to make use of our physical and monetary resources so that we may thrive for another 250 years, serving the needs of the peninsula and beyond.

So, I asked you earlier what you know is a gift of yours that you have to share? How do you learn? What do you need to be engaged? What do you have to offer that is uniquely your gift to share? We long to know and to support you as you grow in discipleship. Amen.