## 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

 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. 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.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot were to 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. 16 And if the ear were to 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. 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? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 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.’ 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 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; 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, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 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. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Luke 4: 14-30

14Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. 16When 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,17and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 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, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20And 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.

21Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”23He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” 24And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. 25But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”  28When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

“Jubilation”

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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.

Reading the response of the people around Jesus to his first prophetic words to them, in a week in which the response to the pastoral words of Bishop Marianne Budde have caused such a dramatic response in the media, I become more keenly aware of just how difficult it is to follow Jesus. What Jesus shared with the people of Nazareth disturbed them, because it challenged their sense of privilege and asked that they widen their welcome, and that message still disturbs those who would foster their own economic and emotional security at the expense of mercy. Wondering what some of the specifics of our own response to Christ’s prophetic call to us are and wondering whether I, or we together, are up to the task in the face of what may feel increasingly like insurmountable shifts to our democratic experiment, I am grateful for a reminder from Annie Dillard. I believe we can hear this passage from her *Holy the Firm* this morning in the context of our opening our eyes more fully, to see more clearly in this season of Epiphany:

“There is no one but us. There is no one to send, not a clean hand or a pure heart on the face of the earth or in the earth—only us… unfit, not yet ready, having each of us chosen wrongly, made a false start, yielded to impulse and the tangled comfort of pleasures, and grown exhausted, unable to seek the thread, weak, and uninvolved. But there is no one but us. There has never been.” *(Annie Dillard, 1945 - )*

Pastor Patricia De Jong reminds us of the importance of today’s lessons in the season of Epiphany; reminds us that Jesus’ first sermon, recounted here in Luke, is part of the way in which his life and mission are revealed to his followers. “The 1991 movie "Hook", which is a sequel to the story of Peter Pan, is the adventure of Captain Hook seeking revenge against Pan for the long past, but never forgotten, crocodile accident. In a scene between Hook (played by Dustin Hoffman) and his first mate Smee (played by Bob Hoskins), Hook momentarily glimpses with clarity the purpose of his life. He confides it to Smee with pride and reverence: "Smee, Smee, I've just had a sublime vision. All the jagged edges of my life have come together to form a complete and mystical whole. An epiphany." "Epipha-what?" Smee mutters and Hook goes on to explain the revelation. Later in the same scene, Smee sets down a golden goblet that rings like a bell as it touches the table. He too, has his own moment of eternal clarity. As a light goes on in his eyes, he tries valiantly to share in Hook's discernment of the sublime: "I've just had an apostrophe!" he exclaims. "Apostrophe, indeed," Hook mutters with exasperation. "I think you mean epiphany." It may be truer for us than we like to think. Most of us do not have daily epiphanies, or even monthly ones. It can seem to us as if an epiphany is almost an apostrophe, a small mark on a big sheet of the paper of life.”

“And all spoke well of him.” That might have been a beautiful moment in what the crowd learned about Jesus in this Epiphanal moment, couldn’t it? But there’s a hitch in the story. Those in Jesus’ hearing that Sabbath day wanted to hear only part of the message. The news for them wasn’t good when it meant that people outside of the chosen Israel were also to benefit from God’s mercy. In fact, Jesus reminds the crowd that only Naaman the Syrian was healed when those in Israel continued to have leprosy. What was Jesus saying? What was he revealing to them?

In preparing for this morning’s sermon, I found myself moving between the two passages we have heard, first electing to respond to one, and then to the other, and finally seeing that in some ways Paul was speaking to a similar problem. Who in the world is deserving of mercy? Is it not *all of God’s* children, and especially those who are hungry or afraid? We need only look to the Middle East to know the way in which tribalism rather than mercy determines actions of individuals and governments. We might ask within the wider church, as well, who among the Church has the right relationship with Christ? *To whom is God speaking and what is meant to be our response?* Do we rise to the challenge of diversity in our midst, or do we want to make everyone just like we are, with the same gifts and the same exact understanding? And on the other side of that question is this one: Do we want to keep the good news to ourselves, believing that we are the ones whom God loves *best*?

For *this* is the year of the Lord’s favor! But how is that to come about? How are we to enter into a year of Jubilee? It seems as though those people who heard Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue may have asked the same question, and didn’t like the answer they received. With indiscriminate love, God’s favor falls upon everyone equally. For the poor and the widowed to receive mercy might mean that those with their feet on more solid ground economically and relationally might have to adjust the lens with which they understand their place in the world. Has there been something this week to make you feel jubilant? To make you feel as though God’s favor is upon you? If so, then great! That’s fantastic! I will rejoice to know of the reasons for your jubilation—truly.

Yet, I also know that any of the sense of the Lord’s favor smiling on *me* this week has to share time with the sadness I feel at the devastation in the lives of our neighbors in Gaza and Ukraine. Any sense of the Lord’s favor smiling on *me* this week has to compete with the anger and sadness I feel for the LGBTQ+ and immigrant communities here in the United States where some are being told that in our country there *is* East, West, North and South, and *all* the definitions that separate rather than unify us. Can there be a real sense of Jubilee when there are people in the world who remain imprisoned; who remain hungry; who remain unable to care for themselves and their families? It is to those difficulties that Jesus calls us to respond. But maybe we would rather this realization were an apostrophe rather than an epiphany. Maybe we would rather our sense of connectedness and responsibility to others were a blip on the screen rather than the screen itself. Maybe we wouldn’t drive Jesus to the edge of a cliff with the intention of throwing him down, but we often don’t like to hear what our faith in Christ asks of us, demands of us.

If there is to be a year of Jubilee, where will it begin? In the Jewish tradition, the period of Jubilee follows the end of Yom Kippur, that holiday when people atone for their sins. After the ceremonial horn, the shofar is blown, the people are to begin to treat the various requirements of the Jubilee year. Do you hear those requirements? Mercy, caring for the widow and the orphan, forgiving debts. So, where is our atonement? Jesus has spoken the words inviting the year of Jubilee, fulfilled in his coming. So, how are we going to respond? For what do we need to atone? We may find it easy to watch the reaction of leaders to Bishop Budde’s sermon and find fault with their inability to look within, but her sermon invites us to do the same. To what can we move in our desire to have all of God’s children jubilant together? I am not a member of very many established organizations or societies; I have been said to be a “joiner” at infrequent times in my life but have been moved to unite with leaders here in Maine to promote gun safety, in large measures because of Ann and others leading us here. I once signed on with the One Movement, an organization begun by the Irish rocker Bono, when I knew the good work they were doing to promote health and food security in Africa, particularly with those who suffer from AIDS. My own voice and money sometimes feel small, but uniting my own with others feels like it makes an impact.

Some of you may be certain that I shouldn’t let the discussion of individual’s rights to enter into a sermon in church. Indeed, I have been told over the last twenty years, repeatedly, that “politics” should be kept from the pulpit. The issue of world hunger and trade worldwide is a political issue, as are the rights of LGBTQ+ persons and immigrants when mistreatment and inequality become legislative concerns determined to define morality in a particular way. From all that I read in the Gospels, I know that Jesus was a highly political leader, calling upon his followers to take strong stances against injustice in all places. And in response to his first sermon, the people want to throw him off a cliff. Do we wish we could do the same? Do we wish that the Gospel imperative to feed the hungry, care for the poor, the widows and the prisoners was not intended to guide *our* lives and our actions? We don’t get to pick and choose the words of Jesus that we wish were intended for us. We have called Jesus our Savior and our Lord, and we are called to respond—in the hymn we have sung, “o’er the tumult.” This *is the year of the Jubilee*, but it can only be that with our help. And for this Jubilee, we are meant to be one in the Body of Christ. Stay tuned until next week, when the many gifts we are given through the Spirit may become not just an apostrophe in our lives, but the great realization, the great Epiphany of what it means to walk with Christ. I found myself wanting to preach with little hints, more and more, enticing you to come back. *Come back to this body.* Grow this body in this time of tumult, because Jesus calls us to respond, with mercy.

Let us pray: Loving and merciful God, teach us to be your hands of mercy, your voice of justice. When we believe we are unworthy or cannot be enough, remind us that you walk with us. We may sometimes feel like we walk the edge of a cliff, but we trust that you will keep us from falling over, even as we aid others who would fall. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Christ. Amen.