

#10 15-16

Psalm 19

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Luke 4:14-21

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

What are We Striving For?

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.

I think that most of us have some idea of what this means for us personally, when we hear this text. It seems to be calling up all the questions from childhood on, “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “How do I fit into my family / the culture around me / the universal scheme of things?” Paul is referring to the newly formed Christian community as parts of a new body! These are folks that have left the Gentile traditions and the Judaic traditions and all that they knew well in order to create a new tradition that of following Jesus’ life and teachings! How challenging that must have been for them!

But something about the Christ experience made them want to walk away from all that they once knew as normal and true, and to create a new way of relating to God and each other, AND the society around them. And there was an energy behind them which inspired Paul and others, to continue working and teaching and preaching and hoping, in spite of all the challenges!

We do not often have these opportunities in our lives to feel that energy of rejecting what we always have done, and to let go, trust the sacred, and do something totally different, as the early Christians did. Most of us have been brought up in the Christian faith and have followed the church year pattern pretty well. And those of our faith who have switched to something completely different can seem a little off to some of us sometimes. So imagine what these early Christians must have been dealing with in the culture they had originated from!

Perhaps the persecution of the early Christians is what cemented their relationships with each other! They knew they were in this together, they just needed new paradigms from which to create a new order! And the image Paul gave them was the Body. How perfect! The Body of Christ - something sacred which we are all intricately related and attached! The concept of our *selves* being sacred enough to be a part of the Son of God! A part of God on this earth! What a perfect goal to live a human life striving for!

And it is all based on a certain degree of equality! Paul makes it seem like even the nose is just as sacred as the brain! That we need to be respectful of those parts of our society that are weak! “[T]he 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.” The last shall be first, the first shall be last . . . everything we start to believe when we get ourselves established as an acceptable and powerful part of society is placed topsy turvy! Suddenly those in positions of power and authority are being asked to seek the meek and treat those who are weak as though THEY are the powerful ones! And it all goes back to the power of being different, and working together, bonding together, creating relationships where there were none before.

There is a documentary out there called - “Happy! A Documentary.” WIKI: “Project Happiness started as personal story. The film came into being after creator Randy Taran discovered that her daughter was stressed, saying “I want to be happy, I just don't know how”. Randy, after speaking with experts, discovered that this situation was more widespread than she had known.

Determined to find a way for her and other parents to speak to their children about happiness, she decided to make a film to educate and initiate the conversation for youth, families and the communities to which they belong."

In the movie there are suggestions to help people who are not happy, to become happy. They share the scientific information behind the feeling of pleasure and happiness. It is based on the Dopamine that is released from the neurotransmitters in the brain and these neurotransmitters can lessen in time. So it is important to use them to keep them active. As one of the interviewers said, we need to seek out the experiences which will create these synapses, and one of the best ways to do so is in novel ways - break the mold of normal behavior - go off script - challenge the norm! And their example for this was the Gorilla run in San Francisco - where people dress up either as Gorillas or as Bananas, and go for a run! It looks as though everyone involved is having the time of their lives!

God is so much bigger than our lives and when we think we have God all packaged up and in control, is when we start to lose our energy, our joy, our enthusiasm. God is the universe and all that is in it and we are being called to discover God! And we are being called to love all of it! We are being called to respect even those bits and pieces which do not fit into our cultural norm, because even those are parts of God which we haven't truly discovered yet.

"Yet" has become one of my favorite words and I got this recent favorite word from seeing a TED talk by Carol S. Dweck on "The Power of Yet or The power of believing that you can improve". She talks primarily from the point of view of an educator I will share some excerpts from her talk:

Just the words "yet" or "not yet," we're finding, give kids greater confidence, give them a path into the future that creates greater persistence. And we can actually change students' mindsets. In one study, we taught them that every time they push out of their comfort zone to learn something new and difficult, the neurons in their brain can form new, stronger connections, and over time they can get smarter.

Look what happened: in this study, students who were not taught this growth mindset continued to show declining grades over this difficult school transition, but those who were taught this lesson showed a sharp rebound in their grades. We have shown this now, this kind of improvement, with thousands and thousands of kids, especially struggling students.

So let's talk about equality. In our country, there are groups of students who chronically underperform, for example, children in inner cities, or children on Native American reservations. And they've done so poorly for so long that many people think it's inevitable. But when educators create growth mindset classrooms steeped in yet, equality happens. And here are just a few examples. In one year, a kindergarten class in Harlem, New York scored in the 95th percentile on the National Achievement Test. Many of those kids could not hold a pencil when they arrived at school. In one year, fourth grade students in the South Bronx, way behind, became the number one fourth grade class in the state of New York on the state math test. In a year to a year and a half, Native American students in a school on a reservation went from the bottom of their district to the top, and that district included affluent sections of Seattle. So the native kids outdid the Microsoft kids.

This happened because the meaning of effort and difficulty were transformed. Before, effort and difficulty made them feel dumb, made them feel like giving up, but now, effort and difficulty, that's when their neurons are making new connections, stronger connections. That's when they're getting smarter.

I received a letter recently from a 13-year-old boy. He said, "Dear Professor Dweck, I appreciate that your writing is based on solid scientific research, and that's why I decided to put it into practice. I put more effort into my schoolwork, into my relationship with my family, and into my relationship with kids at school, and I experienced great improvement in all of those areas. I now realize I've wasted most of my life."

Most of his life - a 13 year old boy . . . and yet . . . he now knows he has the rest of his life to believe in more hope for himself and others! The power of Yet is the constant striving for more . . . the belief that we can know more - and from a Christian setting - what wonders are there?!!! Can you imagine striving for more Christ? More God? More love? More trust? More unity? More of what it means to believe in the Living God through the life and teachings of Christ!?

Paul is asking the Corinthians to strive for the greater gifts! To keep striving for greater knowledge of God and humanity . . . to strive for the revelation of the power of Christ in the world of cultural precedents! We are being asked to look within ourselves and at our Body of Christ as it is and to wonder, "What are we striving for in the name of Christ?" Is it yet to be discovered? Or is it adherence to the pattern, which brings little happiness? Let's strive for Happiness in unity and service! AMEN