

**Sermon preached by Tom Haynes at St. Elizabeth's, Culver
August 2, 2009
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B (Proper 13)**

**2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
Psalm 51:1-13
Ephesians 4:1-16
John 6:24-35**

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be an acceptable offering in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

Some of you may know that I was a lacrosse coach at the Academies for five years. You are thinking “Great. Now we get to hear some lame coaching sermon about how winners never quit or something.” I promise that is not where I am going.

I used to post game summaries and keep online stats for the team. This is some serious business for parents and students. I would coach a game in Ohio, and when I finally made it back home to Culver, my email would be full of people asking for stats. I had been on the team bus all that time, so I am not sure how I was supposed to post numbers.

I came to realize that most people only cared about two things. They cared about goals and they cared about seeing a name on the web page. You think I am kidding. Almost every phone call and email involved these two things.

There is a problem with being too worried about your name and goals scored. Winning lacrosse games has a lot to do with ground balls and good defense. I had created a monster. Everyone was trying to bulldog his way to the net. People were not passing. We were not playing like a team. We looked selfish on the field.

You will laugh at the solution to this. I started naming the people on the web page who were doing the best job with ground balls. I talked about our strong defense, and the best thing was that people who scored were almost never named.

If you throw a pass to someone who scores in lacrosse, it is called an “assist.” The only sure way to get your name on the web page under the Haynes plan was by getting an assist. In other words, I was rewarding what I wanted to see. I needed to see “team” and not “Lone Ranger” on the field.

In this morning's Epistle, we hear Paul telling the Ephesians “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Paul is telling them he wants to see team and he is seeing Lone Ranger instead. There is one body and one Spirit.

Now I will tell you I don't see much sometimes that looks like "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." I see a lot of fragmentation in the Church. We see people getting mad and working at cross purposes.

In one of my Notre Dame classes we talked a lot about unity. We looked at work that has been done to get full communion with one denomination or another. People were saying is that it was a shame we were divided, and as soon as the wrong headed people could realize they had been idiots we could all be united again. I have to admit I don't see much hope in this strategy.

So we see Paul calling us to unity and then we see people feeling all self righteous because they are more holy or have better forms of baptism or something. This is wrong, and I believe it is contrary to the Gospel. If the Church is the Body of Christ, I am convinced the divisions are the wounds on that Body. I don't see denominations as divisions though. I will explain.

Has Bishop Little done his evangelism talk with this group? I am pretty sure I saw something in some old minutes. One of the things he makes a big deal about is that we are in the business of bringing people to Christ. Evangelism does not come at the cost of another church. If people are happy at the Methodist Church that is a good place for them, and we want to support them in their faith journeys. We are not in the business of bringing people from other churches to ours. We are called to bring people to Christ. The folks we are inviting are the unchurched.

Now when I saw a bunch of selfish behavior on the lacrosse field, I took some steps to make it better. I had some success. I wish it were so easy with divisions in the church.

Now I want to make it very clear that I am not saying everyone else should change, and that we are right. I am saying the Episcopal Church is the right place for me, and I am happy to be here. I am likewise happy for people who have found a home at the United Church of Christ or the Roman Catholic Church.

Let's look at the Ephesians reading again. We are Christians because we are baptized. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are members of the Body of Christ. Paul tells us that we have different jobs to do according to our call. He writes

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

I think that this is usually read by people to mean that some people get elected Jr. Warden, and some people work on the altar guild. This is seen as a call to do your job.

The reading is more than that. It is not that we have a job like a chore we have been assigned. We have been given a gift, and we are called to exercise that gift. It is as each of us exercises our gift that all of us come to the unity of faith. By growing in Christ and exercising my gifts, I am doing my part for the Body of Christ.

Now as you look at that list of gifts, I want you to notice that Paul never mentions a gift for pointing out other people's faults. It just is not there. I am going to go a step further. It is not there because it is not what God is calling us to do. We are called to build up the Body of Christ and not to tell other people where they miss the mark.

Those of you who were at the book group are thinking about the discussion about prophets last Tuesday. Are prophets called to point out other peoples faults? Sometimes prophets call people to be aligned with God's will, and that is for sure. Jonah tells people to repent. Nathan is unhappy with David over the whole situation with Bathsheba in this morning's reading. Martin Luther King called for justice. A spiritual director tells you to work on your prayer life and gives you some exercises. These are examples of prophecy.

Now how is this different from telling someone they need to repent being a Lutheran and they need to be aligned with God's will by being at St. Elizabeth's on Sunday morning? This is the difference. We are all baptized into Christ's body. We are given gifts and called to exercise them. This is our baptismal ministry, and this is what we are called to do. It has nothing to do with Lutheran or Episcopal. It has to do with baptism, and it has to do with being a member of the Body of Christ. The prophet tells people to get baptized and answer God's call.

Now Nathan in the 2 Samuel reading this morning tells a story about a man with a sheep. David is a shepherd. He understands sheep. One of those things that he knows is that the shepherd tends his own flock. Nathan tells David a story about a man with his own sheep who takes one that belongs to someone else. David is a shepherd who needs to tend his own flock and leave the other man's sheep alone.

Now, we are not just called to ministry in some abstract way. We are given gifts and work to do. It keeps coming back to this. But there is more... We are given a place to work. Think of it as a flock to tend if you prefer that image. My wife calls this place we are given "where you are planted."

I thank God that each of you is here this morning. I want to thank God for the people who are at the Presbyterian Church too. All Christians regardless of where they worship this morning are members of Christ's Body. We have been planted and have a place to grow. We have gifts and a place to work.

I want to come back to something I said earlier. I was talking about that class at Notre Dame and how people said it was a shame we were divided. The shame is not that we have different places to work. The shame is not that we have different jobs to do for the Kingdom. The shame IS that there are people who don't have a church. They don't have

a place to use their gifts for “building up the Body of Christ.” I don’t care if you are working in this field or the next so long as both fields belong to Jesus.

So where does the wounding of this Body come in? We wound the Body of Christ when we say our field is better and build fences to keep people out. We wound the Body when we don’t see Christ reflected in our brothers and sisters in the church across town. We waste energy if we are telling other people what they are doing wrong when we need to be doing our own jobs and letting them do theirs.

I want you to think about the reading.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

The takeaways are these:

We have been baptized into one Body of Christ.

We all need to do our jobs and let others do theirs. This is the way we can promote the Body’s growth.

There are those with no church family, and these are the ones we need to invite to St. Elizabeth’s.

There is no need for the Lone Ranger church. Selfish behavior does not win lacrosse games, and it does not build up the Body of Christ.

*I have said these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen*