

Epiphany 3

By God's Grace may I speak in the name of the God who reveals Godself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Church is the Body of Christ, and that Body has many different members. It's not all eyes, or all arms or all ears. For the Church, the Body of Christ, to be what God is calling us to be, we need many different members. This is true for the diversity we find in different churches within the Church of England and the different churches of other denominations, the Methodists, the Pentecostal Churches, the Baptist and the Roman Catholics. God works in different ways within and through all these different churches in this country and all around the world.

And it is also true for the diversity we find in every church congregation. God works in different ways in and through every member of a church community, including us here at St Margaret's. The Body of Christ has many different members, and that is a really good thing. The Body of Christ couldn't function properly, if it was all arms, or all feet or all ears.

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.'

For us to be the Body of Christ, we need one another. This is true across different churches and denominations, as the Week of Christian Unity has just reminded us. And it is also true for us here at St Margaret's, we need each other, and we do not all need to be the same for that to be true, on the contrary. For us to be the Body of Christ in this place it is good and necessary for us to be different.

But what really is the Body of Christ for? What is the purpose of the Body of Christ? Well, our gospel reading today can give us a good hint here. Very early on in his public ministry, Jesus ends up back in his hometown, Nazareth, and he is the one to read from the scriptures on the sabbath for the service in the synagogue. As it happens, the reading for that sabbath is from Isaiah:

**'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,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'**

After having read these words, Jesus causes quite the stir by saying:

'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

By saying that this prophesy from Isaiah was fulfilled in their hearing, Jesus claimed to be the one, who is bringing about that fulfilment. And the one to bring about the fulfilment of that prophesy was the Messiah. In front of his old neighbours, of the people who had seen

him grow up, he claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. If we were to read a little further in the gospel of Luke, we would hear how the people of Nazareth had a strong reaction to Jesus' claim. In fact, they chased him out of the town to the edge of a cliff, where they almost threw him over.

What Jesus read in that synagogue and the claim he made to being the fulfilment of these promises is deeply meaningful and important. This moment in the early days of Jesus' public ministry is often called the 'Nazareth Manifesto'. With these words Jesus outlines his calling, his ministry and who he is.

Jesus is good news for all who most need some good news. Jesus brings transformation, healing and new possibilities for those who have lost hope. Jesus stands with all, who are oppressed, overlooked and pushed to the margins. This is Jesus' calling, his ministry, who he is as the Son of God. And as he preaches about the Kingdom of God, calls the most unlikely people to follow him and learn from him, as he heals, as he eats and drinks with the outcasts, the sinners and lost causes, as he speaks truth to power and pays the ultimate price on the cross and as he defeats even death, Jesus fulfils these promises every step of the way.

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And as the Body of Christ, God calls us to be part of the ongoing fulfilment of these promises. There is still so much need for transformation, healing and new possibilities for those who have lost hope. There are still many, who are oppressed, overlooked and pushed to the margins. And God has not forgotten any of that need or any person desperate and hopeless. Into this world God calls the Body of Christ, us, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with our words and actions.

Each one of us has something to offer, a role to play in this calling, this ministry, of who the Church is. We are not all hands, or all eyes or all feet, and that is good so. But we are all needed, every one of us has something to offer. Some speak of God's love and welcome by warmly welcoming people to St Margaret's, some speak of hope and beauty in a broken world by arranging beautiful flowers or sharing beautiful music, some make it their business to share a cup of tea with their lonely neighbour every week. Some stop to have a real conversation with the homeless person overlooked and despised all day long. Some faithfully pray day after day for people and the needs of the world. And each and everything that the different members of Christ's Body offer up matters and contributes to the ongoing fulfilment of those promises. How is God calling you to participate in the ministry of Christ's Body at this time in your life? And if you don't know, who could help you to pray and figure it out together?
Amen.