

"Promoted"

Luke 4:14-21

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

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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 members, 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. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

If you would, I would like to ask everyone to raise their hand. Does everyone have a hand raised? Congratulations!!!

Now, you might be asking why I am congratulating you? Well, it is because you have been promoted. (Hands down). It is true. You have been promoted. We have been promoted.

When we first think about being promoted, we likely think about whether we have had that talk with our boss or the company who is taking time to recognize our gifts and skills and contributions to the company over a certain time period and therefore, we are being rewarded with a move up in the company. With this thought we can break down some of what being promoted carries with it. Being promoted might result in better pay, a new office, more travel perks or bonuses. It also comes with more responsibility. But there is a difference in this added responsibility because with a promotion we have renewed energy to do more of something new, as opposed to doing more of what we had grown accustomed to doing. After being promoted, we carry certain emotions with us; consider the feelings we have the first day we started that new job, moved to a new city, started a new school, became a parent or grandparent. Can we recall the excitement, anticipation, eyes wide open, don't miss a thing, willing and hungry, scared out of our mind but bursting with joy, emotions? Those are real, right!!! Our emotions at that time are like the new hand gesture many athletes are using today: feed me. We want more and are excited to have the opportunity and responsibility to carry. Being promoted is an awesome feeling!!! As we dig deeper into our texts today, I want to encourage us not to lose that feeling. We have been promoted. Woohoo!!

At the core, a promotion is understood as a positive change or move forward. When we hear it this way, the door is open for a promotion to be possible, not just externally, but internally as well.

I was at a conference several years ago in which the speaker stood up to begin his first keynote address. He began by introducing himself and sharing a little of his background. He was a former NFL Defensive End playing with and against some of football's greatest. As he now made his living as a pastor and mentor to young men in some of our country's toughest neighborhoods, what he said next really stuck with me. He declared to everyone, "I have been promoted." He went on to share how his life was richer and more full of what life is truly about, as opposed to having the Monday night spotlight on ESPN.

What I think this example, along with our texts for today are getting at is that a life lived in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in all of God's children richly, is a life of promotion.

Consider a balloon without any air in it. We talked about this at bible study on Thursday morning. A balloon made of latex, just laying on a table is limp. There is no life and very little that balloon can be used for. What happens when you put air in it? It gains life. It is promoted to a higher purpose of floating, playing, resting, filling, protecting, and whatever else a balloon can be used for.

When we place our trust and belief in God and Christ as our savior, we are in turn filled by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the breath of life we have, the same breath that causes our chest

to rise and fall, and the puff of steam that blows out of our mouth on a cold day, is the same breath and spirit breathed into humanity at the beginning of creation. It is the source of true life. When we acknowledge that, we are promoted. Our lives become better, richer, and more exciting. We grow in confidence and strength and knowledge. We gain a partner in life that will be with us always and in all circumstances. We gain a community of others to walk with on the journey. We grow in our willingness to respond to what God calls us to do and when we follow God's ways, our life is filled with joy (mostly because I think we begin doing what we were meant to do instead of fighting against God with what we feel we must do). Our belief in Christ has the greatest return on investment of anything we can imagine, because our lives are fulfilled with an eternal purpose giving every element of our lives greater meaning.

The sacraments we celebrate as a community of faith embody this. **Baptism:** We come to the water of baptism as individuals, independent and relatively self-contained. We come out of that water changed. We can no longer be known without reference to the community we have just been welcomed into. In our baptism, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we find our belonging in the church. And when we find our belonging, we are promoted. **Communion:** We often come to the table for communion tired, weary, hungry, searching for strength and nourishment. We return from the table changed. We become refreshed and sustained for our journey. At the table, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are gifted the greatest love one could ever receive. And when we have received that love, which can only come from God, we are promoted.

In the Luke text, the picture of promotion is painted with Jesus being fulfilled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Luke is revealing to us the Holy Spirit's involvement in the life of Jesus as he steps forth in public ministry. In many ways, we learn that even Jesus is not self-sufficient. He is dependent upon his God (who is also his father) for life, faith, and mission. This part of Luke, which includes Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, is preceded by the brief story of Jesus' baptism and the longer account of his temptation in the wilderness.

Luke portrays all three of these events, Jesus' baptism, temptation, and ministry, as attributed to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove while he is praying after his baptism and speaks the claiming word of affirmation. Then the Holy Spirit fills and leads Jesus into the wilderness for a time of testing as Jesus refuses pathways that are the wrong choices for his servant ministry. Then, as Jesus returns to Galilee, the Holy Spirit fills him with power for ministry as he shares with the people his mission statement as Messiah: to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Isaiah 61).

All throughout the scriptures, Jesus submits his will to that of God and the Holy Spirit, and in doing so, as the one who came in love to save the world from its own ways, exemplifies for us what a promoted life in the Holy Spirit, who dwells and works in and through us, looks like.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the picture of promotion is painted with the community of believers, the body of Christ, also being fulfilled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The image of the body of Christ to describe the church conveys both complexity and organic unity: it is about being a community that shares its life.

The human body has 206 bones, 639 muscles, and about 6 pounds of skin, along with ligaments, cartilage, veins, arteries, blood, fat, and more. Every time we hear a sound; every time we take a step; every time we take a breath, hundreds of different parts work together so that what we experience is a single movement; our minds and bodies working as one unit. Even the greatest engineers struggle to achieve anything like it in mechanical form. The human body represents one of the most, if not the most, complex systems in existence.

It is likely we can all find a body part we can relate to. By finding our place in the body as hands, feet, funny bone or head and not just settling in on what might be convenient, we begin to find our place in the church. Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in each one of us, able to discern who is meant to do what, we might all be on top of each other confused on who is going to do what. The Holy Spirit is a guide for us all individually and collectively, helping to keep the body functioning effectively. We must do our part in listening and following the Spirit. You, your mission is to serve (and yours and yours); and your mission is to teach (and yours and yours); and your mission is to show compassion (and yours and yours); and your mission is to... *fill in the blank*.

One of the toughest reality's, as well as greatest blessings, in belonging to the church is that we share each other's lives in good times and in bad. This is what Paul says is the tangible expression of God's care. We grow in our knowledge and confidence of God's love for us when we are held in a community of love. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

I still wake up at night thinking about some of the team drills we had to do at practice when I was in college. One comes to mind: During this exercise, if one person made an error, we all had to run a lap around the field; every time someone made an error, even if it was the first play after we returned from running. The worst part was running, but I was a catcher, so I had to run the lap in all my equipment. I know, it doesn't seem fair, does it? But I knew what I signed up for. When one struggled, we all struggled.

On the other hand, when we won the championship, we rejoiced together. We no longer thought about those laps around the field. Our winning wasn't because of one successful play by one person, but a compilation of successful plays by everyone.

I didn't know this at the time, but I certainly do now, that our coach was trying to emphasize to the team that without each other we would be nothing. The saying goes "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link." We need to strengthen all links to be stronger as a team, stronger as a body. The more promoted we have involved, the more qualified we are as ONE to do the work God calls us to.

Often credited to Nelson Mandela, Marianne Williamson was once quoted:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that **we are powerful beyond measure**. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually, who are you (we) not to be? **We are children of God**. Our playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around us. **We are all meant to shine**, as children do. **We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us**. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Brothers and Sisters, it is time to be excited, with eyes wide open, willing and ready to do whatever it takes, because in Christ and through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are promoted!!!

Let all God's people say... amen.