

Some two thousand years ago, two young men set off on a journey. These men were converts to a strange new religious movement sweeping across the Roman Empire. They followed a brilliant, passionate man, a foreigner to them at a time when to be foreign was to be alien, threatening, or even an enemy. Without the bonds of their new faith, these two young men would never so much as broken bread with their missionary leader, much less make him their traveling companion. But Saint Paul's burning conviction was the kind that tore down the barriers of the old world in his passion for preaching the coming of a new world. And these two young men, Timothy and Titus, found themselves embracing this strange new religion. Baptized into the Christian faith through water and the fire of the Holy Spirit, Timothy and Titus set out to share that Baptism across the world.

Today, January 26, marks the customary feast day of Saint Timothy and Saint Titus. These young men were both Greeks, which made them invaluable resources for Paul in his missionary work across a Greek-speaking world. But they were also Greeks at a time when the Early Church wasn't sure if the Gospel of Jesus Christ was even meant to be shared with Gentiles like Timothy and Titus. What would it mean—what would it really mean—to worship a God for all people and nations? A God not about elevating one people over all others but of calling all people—a human race of lost sinners—to return to the loving, divine, embrace through the salvation of Jesus Christ.

These debates raged in the early Church as Timothy and Titus carried out their faithful witness to Christ in Antioch, Crete, Thessalonica, and Corinth. What does it mean to worship a God who has made all of humankind in the Divine image? What does that say about our responsibilities to God—and our responsibilities to each other?

Our reading from 1 Corinthians this morning speaks to the question God presses to each of our hearts as we go about our daily life and work. As Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles tell us, the early church might have been a holy movement set ablaze by the Holy Spirit—but it was also a group of human beings. And we human beings often have lesser concerns on our minds than spreading the Kingdom of God.

Are the rich really called to share their wealth and break bread with the poor? Are Jews really to consort with Greeks? Are men really to worship with women?

We may scoff at these first-century preoccupations, but are we really much different from our forebearers? Social mores change, categories of who is clean and unclean shift, but at the end of the day we often catch ourselves looking for a way out.

“Who is my neighbor?” we ask, seeking easy answers. “No really, who is my neighbor? My real neighbor?”

And Christ answers, always in love but never giving us those easy answers we’re looking for: “The Samaritan. The Jew. The Greek. The Roman. The Democrat. The Republican. The police officer, the criminal, the alien, the poor, the outcast, the sinner...”

This is a hard message to accept. It is an even harder message to live. As fallen human beings we are always looking to categorize, to set apart, to see who is really worthy of our love and support. Timothy and Titus devoted their lives to spreading this radical message across the world, to any who would listen: “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.”

We come to the water of Baptism as individuals, independent and self-contained. But we emerge from that water changed. In Baptism we receive a new identity, one of community and membership in the body of Christ. Through Baptism we are changed. We become more than just ourselves. We become beings drawn back into relationship with our creator, the living God.

As human beings, we crave membership and acceptance. The world offers us shadows, pale reflections of what we really want. Membership in a community, a business, a sports team, a military unit, a social club, a political party. We move from space to space, subtly altering ourselves and our identities in order to meet worldly standards of approval.

But membership in Christ is different. In Christ we are called to be different, but not to win worldly approval or even God’s. God’s approval cannot be earned or won because God’s love is freely given. The battle has already been won and through Baptism we are called to share in Christ’s victory over the powers of Sin and Death.

Through Baptism we become part of the body of Christ. Every day we deepen our connection to God, seeking to become more like Christ even as we try, fail, fall, pick ourselves up, and try again. Membership in this body, in this community of the Church, is not like a club where you change things about yourself for a few hours in order to fit in. It is not like a job, where you clock in and then clock out. To be part of the body of Christ is a state of being, a steady transformation over the course of our whole lives. We are transformed through Baptism in order to do the work of the Kingdom. And sisters and brothers, there is so much work to do!

Each and every one of you carries the work of the Body of Christ with you. When you volunteer your time, talent, and treasure here, you do the work of the Body. When you volunteer elsewhere you do the work of the Body. When you share the love of Christ, when you shine the light of the risen Lord into the dark places of this world, you do the work of the Body. When you feed the hungry, visit the sick, clothe the naked, that is the work of the Body. And when you smile at a stranger as they pass you by—an act that might seem trivial to you but might be the one unconditional act of kindness that person experiences that day—that too is the work of the Body!

And the work of the body can only be done in community.

Finley, today this church welcomes you into the Body of Christ. Today, this community makes you a promise, that we will do all in our power to support you as you and your family as you begin your long journey of discipleship. Hold us to that promise. Because this is not a journey that happens alone. We rely on each other as Paul relied on Timothy and Titus. We support each other as those first missionaries supported each other on their quest to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We try. We stumble. We fall. And we rise and try again. We return to the Eucharistic table to renew and strengthen ourselves for the work of discipleship. We remind ourselves of our Baptismal vows time and time again, strengthening and fortifying our resolve to resist evil and respect the dignity of every human being.

We are a flawed, imperfect body. But through Christ, that body is made perfect and whole. We are washed clean through the waters of Baptism and sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit, which marks us as Christ's own forever.

In today's Gospel Jesus reads: "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 favor.

On that day the congregation in the Synagogue saw that scripture fulfilled in their hearing. And that scripture continues to be fulfilled through the work of the body and the power of the risen LORD.