

Topic: A Vision for the Church.

Subtopic: The Church's vision grows out of its union with Christ.

Video URL: [https://youtu.be/mXURjh\\_2A44](https://youtu.be/mXURjh_2A44)

The Gospel chosen for today deals with Jesus' inaugural sermon in which he sets the agenda for his entire ministry. He begins by declaring, *"the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."*<sup>1</sup> This anointing was a critical element in his Messianic calling. Then he describes the mission he was given, starting with an announcement of his purpose to bring *"deliverance to the captives."*<sup>2</sup> Through Christ, sin is pardoned, and the sinner is restored. His ministry agenda includes more than a New Deal, a Fair Deal, a New Frontier, or a Great Society. Instead, he focuses on *"recovery of sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed."* Then, in his conclusion, he proclaims *"the acceptable year of the Lord,"* a Jewish term used for the freeing of Hebrew slaves and the forgiveness of all debts. This means that even if one is guilty, they are given freedom to return to the Lord. This offer was indeed good news for those who were wounded by the heavy sorrows of a sin-sick world.

This grand statement of his mission and purpose has relevance not only for himself but also for all who would follow him. Paul tells us in our New Testament lesson today that Christ and his Church form one body, of which he is the head.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 4:18a

<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:18b

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12

Church of Jesus Christ is a marvelous mystery, where the Lord himself is present with those who gather together in his name.

I will never forget the awe and wonder I felt as I experienced something of this sacred mystery when I was called as a youth minister at Saint James in Potomac, Maryland. The priest at that time made it my obligation to attend every vestry meeting. At first, I could not imagine anything that could be more boring. But to my amazement, I started to see how people from diverse backgrounds, with unique skills and various points of view, could work together for the common good of the church. Then, in the midst of this diversity, I began to see a manifestation of God's wisdom.

I learned an important lesson from this experience, namely, that I needed the help and support of others if my ministry was ever to be successful. It is through each of us, who are baptized into his body, Jesus still lives for the fulfillment of his mission. We are now the ones who are anointed to bring good news to those who don't have any. Our striving toward this goal is not meant to be in isolation from others. We were made to live in a community with others, where Christ is made known as we come together in his name.

Paul goes on to tell us, ***“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”***<sup>4</sup> We all need each other to accomplish the work God has called us to do. None of us can fully comprehend all that God has for us, but together we can each supply what others are lacking. Therefore Paul wrote,

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7

***“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”<sup>5</sup>***

Our various gifts have their own innate strengths and weaknesses. Therefore these various gifts can cause tensions and disharmony if not handled wisely. For example, a person with prophetic skills may see things with a strong moral sense of right and wrong, whereas a person with the gift of mercy may emphasize the need for compassion in dealings with people’s shortcomings. A person with a prophetic gift can tend to be judgmental, while the person with the gift of mercy, may be inclined to be soft on sin. These two polar opposite gifts need to function together. We all have to acknowledge our need for all the members. In order for the arm or leg to do its work, we need muscles pulling in different directions while being coordinated by their connection to the head, who directs each part to do its job.

We need those who have the gifts of healing to bring wholeness and compassion to those who have been wounded and torn. We need those who have the prophetic skills to help us apply God’s written word to the areas where we have fallen short of God’s will and purpose. We also need the voices of the reconcilers, the builders, the peacemakers, and the dreamers of dreams.

As in a natural body, the good of the whole should be the objective of all. As *“all Christians are dependent upon one another; each is to expect and receive help from the rest.”<sup>6</sup>* Unfortunately, this is not always the case in real life. In a fallen human environment, cancerous cells exist. Such cells “do not

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:26

<sup>6</sup> Quote from Matthew Henry’s Commentary on 1 Corthinians 12

respond to signals from other cells, and they grow in an unorganized manner.”<sup>7</sup> But by ***“the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ, we can be set free from the law of sin and death.”***<sup>8</sup> We can be an example of the love and life of Christ to one another. There is one vine, of which Christians are the branches. There is one building, of which Christians are living stones, with Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Jesus has promised, ***“If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing.”***<sup>9</sup>

It is always an incredible and humbling experience when we see and experience these different gifts at work. It makes us know and feel that we are part of something much greater than we could ever be on our own.

The knowledge of this vision is celebrated week by week in our church’s music. The popular hymn, “Lead on, O King eternal,”<sup>10</sup> expressed with heartfelt faith the beauty of this concept:

*Lead on, O King eternal,  
till sin’s fierce war shall cease,  
and holiness shall whisper  
the sweet amen of peace.  
For not with swords’ loud clashing  
or roll of stirring drums  
with deeds of love and mercy  
the heavenly kingdom comes.*

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<sup>7</sup> Quote from The National Cancer Institute, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>9</sup> John 15:5

<sup>10</sup> The Church Hymnal, 1982, # 555 Author: Ernest W. Shurtleff

These words confront our complacency and inspire us with a vision to be a community in which God lives by his Spirit. We are his hands and feet, with eyes and ears, mouth and nose; all on a distinct body here at Saint Mary Magdalene, and in this body, we all have an essential part. The prayer is of Saint Francis is a critical reminder of our calling, “Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.”<sup>11</sup> This is the year of the Lord’s favor. God has called us, anointed us, and will lead us to accomplish all that He has in store for us as we abide in his love, and he abides in us. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> Prayer of Saint Francis, BCP, p. 833