

Sermon 9-16-18
Pastor Ray Lorthioir
Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
Based on Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18 and Philippians 2:5-11

Head and Body

I begin this morning with two simple but very difficult teachings. The first is Ephesians 1:22-23, "22 And God placed all things under his [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." The second is similar to it. Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church. . ."

The Creator of the universe has brought all of the creation under the authority of the Messiah. The good news here is that a real human being now fulfills the role Adam was designed for, but walked away from.

We understand from Genesis 1:26-27 that Adam and Eve were both created in the Image of God, and were given authority over all of creation by Yahweh, our Creator. Created in the Image of God means that Adam and Eve operated completely and absolutely under Yahweh's definitions of good and evil. Indeed, they operated so completely under Yahweh's rules that they didn't know what evil is. They did not experience it. They were as righteous as their Creator. They were entirely committed to their Creator – in love with their Creator, as much as Yahweh is in love with us to this day.

For reasons best known to Himself, Yahweh placed a certain tree in the middle of the Garden He had created for Adam and Eve. Over the years I have speculated that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a fruit of covenant, meaning agreement. Every time Adam passed that tree without eating of its fruit, he was affirming his love and commitment to Yahweh. He was confirming that he was made in the image of God. He was agreeing with God not to eat.

However, we read in chapter three of Genesis that Eve was confronted by a rebel member of the angel species, who had indwelt a dinosaur type creature that was not yet condemned to being a snake. The serpent deceived Eve into giving up the Image of God for what he called being Like God, knowing good and evil. There was only one problem. Adam and Eve not only became Like God, knowing good and evil, they became gods, defining good and evil for themselves. And that's our situation to this day. We all stand condemned before Yahweh because we have defined good and evil for ourselves and acted upon it. This is original sin. It's the sinful nature. We're born with it. We're helpless because of it. For, even if we agree with Yahweh's definitions of good and evil – His commandments – we cannot fulfill them wholeheartedly.

Graciously, however, on the very day Adam and Eve forsook the Image of God, Yahweh made a promise to them. In time, a male human being would be born of woman who in holy righteousness would crush the head of the serpent, while suffering a deadly bite. In so doing, He would free human beings from the slavery of the Likeness of God, and restore us to the righteous Image of God. Jesus of Nazareth

eventually fulfilled that prophecy, and all the other 308 or so biblical prophecies about Messiah.

Therefore, unlike other world religions, Christianity has an historical record of things done in real time. Both ancient secular as well as biblical sources declare that a man called Jesus of Nazareth really lived, was really crucified by the Roman government, was really reported resurrected from the dead, and whose tomb was actually found empty. By all the rules of valid historical research, this is true history. Skeptics fight the truth with lies and propaganda, but only because they can't stand the truth being true.

Now, because Jesus obediently followed the path of suffering prophesied for God's Messiah in Moses and the prophets, He won a great victory upon that Roman cross. For this reason an early Christian hymn declares in Philippians 2:5-7, "5... Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

In other words, even though He is God – one with the Father and Holy Spirit – when Jesus came incarnate in sinless but mortal human flesh, He did not determine good and evil for Himself. He did not determine for Himself whether the Messianic prophecy was good or evil, even though Satan urged Him to do so. No. He made Himself a servant of God in the true human Image of God and fulfilled prophecy. Thus, the hymn continues in Philippians 2:8, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!"

In death – a horrible unjust death – Jesus faithfully submitted Himself to the plan established in Scripture hundreds of years before He walked the earth. He became the sacrificial Lamb of God who would atone for and destroy the Likeness of God we're born with so that we might be born again in the Image of God.

The hymn concludes in Philippians 2:9-11, "9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This hymn is based on Isaiah 45:23-24, "23... 'Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. 24 They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.'""

By the way, this is why it's customary to get on our knees during Holy Communion. It's also why people genuflect. Muslims get on their knees and bow down five times a day to a god who is a caricature of the true God. But they're on to something. Try bowing your knee before Jesus. It's a spiritually healthy thing to do.

Now, the hymn in Philippians brings us back to the verses from Ephesians and Colossians. Because Jesus was obedient even to death on a cross, Yahweh has exalted the God-man Jesus to the place Adam abandoned. Jesus has been made head over all of Creation for our sake.

Jesus' headship is something that must be received by faith in God's declaration through Paul. For, our experience tells us that this universe remains as dangerous as it has ever been. And, Scripture prophesies that the cosmic reality of Jesus' headship will be revealed only at the close of the age with His second coming. Therefore, in the present age the headship of Jesus can only be received by faith in God's Word.

However, Jesus described a way in which we can know the truth of His headship even in this present age. It's found in the prayer He prayed in John 17:1-3, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." In other words, if you or anyone else knows the only true God and Jesus Christ, His Son, that's a sign of Jesus' authority over all things. Indeed, it's the primary way we experience the headship of Jesus in the present age.

Jesus headship is also confirmed by what He said just prior to ascending into heaven in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He then said in Matthew 28:19-20, "19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Christians have made disciples for centuries! But, it's only possible because Jesus has been made head over all things. Indeed, every Christian that will ever live is proof that Jesus has been made head over all things.

Now, if you remember from Ephesians 1:22, God made Jesus head over all things for the church – for the church. God has lavished His love upon the human race by giving us a new Adam, namely Jesus. And all things are in His hands for the church.

In Ephesians 1:23 Christ's body is used as a metaphor for the church. In Scripture, the church is called Christ's body in various other places. Now, we all know that there is a definite organic relationship between a head and a body. A body can't live without a head and a head can't live without a body.

But, in the Kingdom of God it's a bit different. Jesus, the head, can live without the church, His body. But the church can't live without Jesus. Jesus can live without you. But ultimately you cannot live without Jesus. Jesus can live without us. But we cannot live without Jesus.

Therefore, the connection of Christ's body to Christ the head is most important. This is true for each of us individually as believers. It's also true for us corporately as the church.

Our Creator has made these physical bodies of ours marvelous – even though they are doomed to die. All our parts, all our systems are designed to work together as a comprehensive whole. All our parts, all our systems are designed to work together for our wellbeing. If one part or one system does not work or works out of synchronization with the others, then the whole body suffers. This is known as disease. Disease brings suffering. Ultimately, it can bring death. Metaphorically speaking a similar thing can happen in Christ's Church.

In recent days we've been watching the Roman Catholic Church writhing in agony as allegations of a sickness in the body have come forward. The primary cause of the sickness is accusations against a small percentage of leaders who are alleged to have misused their spiritual authority to foist their own sexual sin upon others. And there is a subsequent controversy concerning the method that was used to discipline these leaders. As we're beginning to see, this controversy runs up and down the nervous system of the church, even to Rome itself. Will anything good come of it?

At Trinity, we ourselves have come through a prolonged period of sickness. Charges and counter-charges of various types have ripped the fabric of the congregation to the point that we have to start over. The devil hates it if the body of Christ is healthy. He will do all in his power to bring illness. How, then, can Christ's Church, His precious body be healed?

Healing for Christ's body is two-fold – reattachment to the head and re-attachment to the other parts of the body. Of course, this also is a metaphor. In reality it's re-attachment to Jesus and re-attachment to one another through Christ. In addition it's preparing the groundwork for attachment to the body of Christ for those who will respond to the Word we proclaim.

Living in an orthodox Jewish neighborhood, it's not unusual when walking around at certain hours and on certain days to see the door of a house open and ten to twenty men and boys come bursting out. What just happened? A minyan or prayer meeting ended. A minyan is a meeting where ritual prayer for the good of the Jewish community is made. Ten men make a minyan. In a large Jewish community like West Hempstead, there are many multiple minyans.

One can scoff at the ritual nature of the prayer. But regular minyans work. A minyan doesn't take too long and it binds the local community together. The men become devoted to one another. They come together for the spiritual and physical good of one another and their community. Now, if such a thing works with those who are resistant to the suffering Messiah, how much more should it work with those whom Lord Holy Spirit has called to eternal life with one another under the headship of Jesus Christ?

Therefore, we have to be clear about one thing. Christianity is not Jesus and me. It's Jesus and His people. It's Jesus and us. Indeed, when the apostle John was shown things in heaven He did not see a few individuals attached to Jesus. Rather, the book of Revelation tells us in Revelation 7:9, "... [I saw] a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." All there were connected to Jesus, the Lamb, but they were also connected to one another. John was told in Revelation 7:14-15, "14... 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.'"

What did they have in common between them? They had all come out of the great tribulation. The great tribulation is not some future event. It's what all Christians have been going through since the Day of Pentecost 33A.D. We are fellow participants in the great tribulation. And because we're in it, we need each other. That's what the body of Christ is all about – connection to Jesus and through Him to each other.

In this present age it's not easy to be the body of Christ. For we're all conceived and born in that "likeness of God thing." We're all born sitting on the throne of God determining good and evil for ourselves. This is hardly conducive to real community and genuine love for our neighbors.

Therefore, the only way into true Christian community is for each of us to jump off God's throne in real repentance. Real repentance revolves around seeing good

and evil only as God sees it. What Yahweh calls good in His Word is good. What He calls evil in His commandments is evil. When by the work of God's Holy Spirit we can accept good and evil God's way, then real community becomes a possibility. For all can then see the common goal and the common good. We can all identify evil for what it truly is. This is a significant aspect of what it means to be the body of Christ, His church.

Let's look one last time at Ephesians 1:22-23, "22 And God placed all things under his [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Verse 23 is very peculiar. In it the church is declared to be the fullness of Jesus.

I think that statement is quite beyond our comprehension. Being sinners, we know that the church is often anything but the fullness of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Lord Holy Spirit through the apostle declares this to be so in a cosmic and powerful way. The reality of the statement like everything else in Christianity rests upon Jesus' holy sacrifice upon the cross and His resurrection. Therefore, when repentant people hear this Word, things can happen. For the statement then becomes a matter for faith.

Remember. The apostle James said, "I will show you my faith by what I do." We are what we believe. Therefore, in the first tier of faith we hear that the church is the fullness of Jesus Christ. In the second tier of faith we confess it back to Jesus. Lord, You say Your Church is Your fullness. You say we are your fullness. In the third tier faith personalizes it. Lord, by your cross, You have said I am part of Your body, your Church. You are my head. You are head over all these other believers surrounding me whom You have also called and connected to me. Together, we are your body, your fullness, You who fill everything in every way. Therefore, by faith, let the power of Your sacrifice be upon us so that together Your Word may be fulfilled in us. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.