

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, January 27th, 2019

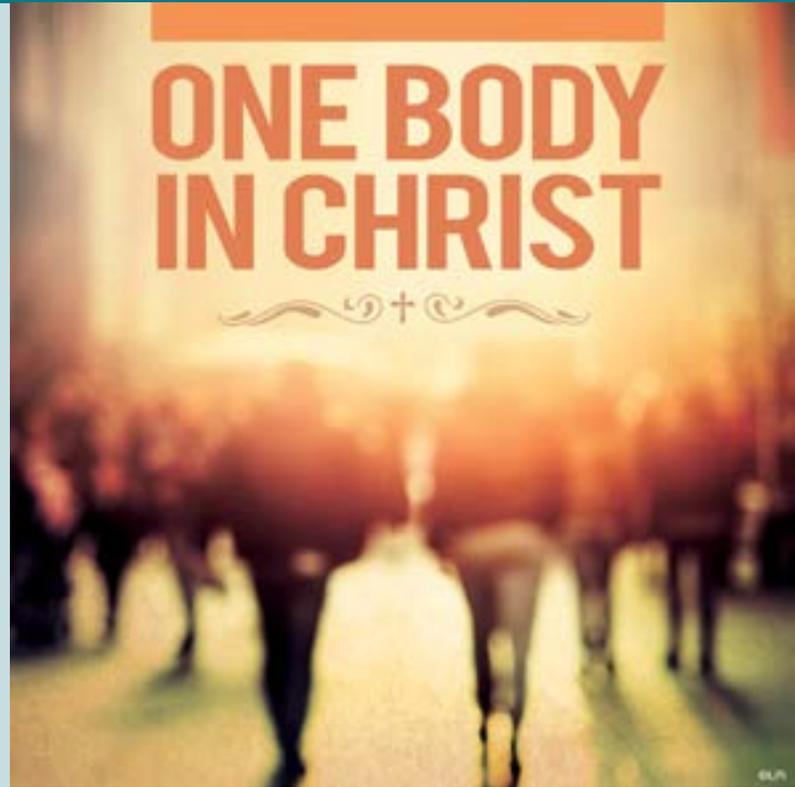
## Everyone Has A Place

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21



The pages of history reveal the grave suffering of humanity written on many faces and etched in many hearts. Taking on different forms and found in different places, confronting and understanding the place and meaning of suffering is a tremendous task that presents itself to each of us. St. Paul tells us, *"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."* As members of the one Body of Christ, we carry with us the full extent of human suffering and are called, with God's help, to transform it into joy!

In his encyclical letter *"Saved in Hope,"* Pope Benedict states, *"A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and bear it inwardly through 'compassion' is a cruel and inhuman society. Yet society cannot accept its suffering members and support them in their trials unless individuals are capable of doing so themselves; moreover, the individual cannot accept another's suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey in hope."*

The Body of Christ, and by extension humanity in general, has to have all of the members working in proper order. Each must function in their own unique way in order for the greater whole to work. We cannot simply step over or set aside those who suffer or escape the peril and uncertainty of it ourselves. We need to look it square in the eye and become involved with the experience.

However, we tend to fear our darkness and avoid encountering it at all costs. Yet, when we do, we find not only a new depth and dimension of being ourselves, but are able to be a consoling haven for others who are in the same place. As heart-wrenching as suffering is, sharing it with another softens its burden.

Of all of the biblical passages Jesus could have chosen to read, he read the one from Isaiah. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."* The very life and mission of Jesus was focused on encountering suffering and being with those who suffer, patiently enduring the pain, holding fast to one's faith in God, and allowing God's transformational wonders to bring hope and healing. By our baptism, we have "put on Christ" and are called to that same life and mission.

The human condition, with all of its messiness, irregularities, sinfulness, imperfection, brokenness, suffering, and conflicting ideologies, is our condition. It is also the condition into which God was born. There is room for everyone. This is how God designed things in the first place. Our world is filled with division, and that division causes suffering. The road is rocky and the path uncertain. Even the person of faith often has difficulty truly seeing. Thomas Merton prayed it well, "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so." Forging onward, we do the best we can with what we have. We need to trust that we are guided and being led by a God who desires nothing more than to bring us to a place of wholeness.

How do I help create a world that expresses and pursues the justice spoken about through the prophet Isaiah? There is still great division and discord that exist in almost every corner of our world. This division and discord lead to greater pain, alienation, and suffering. The establishment of Isaiah's vision and God's desire begins when we focus on basic teachings to which Jesus calls us: love God with all your heart, mind, and soul ... love your enemies ... do good to those who hurt you ... do not judge. Applying these simple principles does not mean that we advocate a relativistic free-for-all where every belief and action, regardless of whether it has a true moral compass, is appropriate.

There are definite principles, moral and ethical mores, and appropriate codes of behavior to follow. By example, even though Jesus did not condemn the woman caught in adultery, he did not baptize the behavior either!

It all may sound a bit trite, but manifesting God's vision simply involves an attentiveness to the joys, pains, and sufferings of our brothers and sisters. We need to be sure that everyone has a place and is treated with respect and kindness. We need to learn the art of listening. We must cease using the "mine and yours" dichotomy and begin to speak in terms of "ours and God's". Militant negativity has no place in the healing process, and issuing forth sharp condemnations only further promotes division. Leading people to God and truth is a process that takes great time and patience. Its success is due not necessarily to the words that come out of our mouths but what is witnessed by the example of our lives.

Is my life unifying the Body of Christ (and by extension the world), attending to the needs of all parts and members, and further advancing the Kingdom of God? It's not about controlling and defending but healing and empowering. If we take this task to heart and are successful, it can then be said that "today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

Rev. Mark Suslenko

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## PRAYER

*Dear Jesus,  
help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go.  
Flood our souls with your spirit and life.  
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly  
that our lives may only be a radiance of yours.  
Shine through us and be so in us  
that every soul we come in contact with  
may feel your presence in our soul.  
Let them look up and see no longer us, but only Jesus.  
Amen.*

— taken from the Prayer of St. Teresa of Calcutta