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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

June 28, 2026

Proper 8, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalms 89:1-4, 15-18

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

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Back around the year 400, St. Augustine, a bishop in North Africa, made one of the classic statements about the Eucharist. Preaching to the newly baptized on Easter morning, he pointed to them, and to the bread on the altar, and said: You are the Body of Christ. So what is placed on the altar is you yourself, and when you receive it, you say amen to what you are. Place yourself on the altar; receive what you are; be what you receive.

We use the word “body” a lot in church. We talk about being members of one body, about the resurrection of the body, about the Bread as Christ’s body. But those are kind of scripted, theological ways of talking about bodies that can sometimes even feel, well, a little disembodied: a little distant from the flesh we all live in, eating, drinking, walking around, touching and being touched. It’s one thing to say you are part of Christ’s body, another thing to say Christ is fully present in your dandruff or your jigglings love handles.

Our culture isn't actually that great at talking about bodies. We often either idolize and idealize the body through celebrities and fitness culture, or shame it for not living up to those unrealistic standards. And in the church, there's been an unfortunate tendency through the centuries to look down on the body and treat it mostly as a source of potential sin, whether through sex or food or drink or dancing or whatever behavior seemed to threaten good order and decency.

Today in our reading from his letter to the Romans St. Paul talks about presenting our members to God as instruments of righteousness. Now that word "member" means body parts. I don't know why our translation doesn't just translate it that way, unless it's out of a kind of reserved formality, because no one today talks about bodily members unless they're being silly or gruesome. Paul is urging us to present our arms and legs and trunks and love handles to God as an offering, a gift, which God in turn takes and makes holy and returns to us for our use. In other words, Paul is saying, the body is not the enemy of holiness: it's the equipment for holiness. Our bodies are a good gift from God that we in turn are called to present to God for God's delight.

Not that we always do. Paul talks also about how we can employ our bodies for harm instead of good. He uses the metaphor of being slaves to sin—a powerful image of his place and time. It's like that, he seems to be saying: there are forces of destruction that hold us in bondage, that we can't get away from. So he says, God has bought you! You belong to a different master now, not to sin but to God. And even as he uses these slavery metaphors he realizes how inadequate they are and says, "I'm speaking to you in human terms to try to help you understand."

We may not live with the reality of slavery staring us in the face but we can recognize what Paul is saying. Our own bodies can be trapped in patterns of behavior that harm us and harm others. We can see it in things like substance addictions, or other types of compulsive behavior around sex or gambling or self-harm. These kinds of patterns we can get trapped in aren't so much individual vices as choices we can't not make, not without help from the outside. Just as Paul's culture had a familiar vocabulary for slavery, ours has a vocabulary for addiction. And we rightly treat it more and more as a disease to be treated rather than as a misdeed to be chastised. It's not so much that addiction is a sin as that sin of any kind is a type of addiction: the resentments we cultivate, the consumption patterns we cannot break. We can't step out of it on our own and we can't save ourselves from it. But there is someone who can: the one who made our bodies in the first place. The one who loves them, takes delight in them, and wants them joyous and free.

So how do we live as those who are being set free? How does a body live that knows it is loved?

When we present our body parts to God as living offerings, we'll find ourselves living in certain ways. It will affect how we eat and drink: with gratitude, with awareness of where our food and drink comes from and how it's produced and the impact it has on the earth and its creatures; not gorging ourselves nor starving ourselves, but savoring good things with pleasure.

It will affect how we work and play and rest: in a healthy rhythm and balance, where we don't have to earn our right to take up space in this world by constant productivity. There's a pastor out there named Tricia Hersey who a few years ago started a project called The Nap Ministry, encouraging people to rest not just as an act of self-care but as a witness against the forces in our society that say our worth is in what we produce. Her book is titled *Rest as Resistance*.

It will affect our lives as people who attend to other people's bodies: who feed the hungry, as we do here each week at Open Table; who listen to the lonely, tend the sick, and advocate for the poor.

And it will affect our lives as people who love and are loved, touch and are touched, desire and are desired. For far too long Christians have tended to treat our lives as sexual people as mostly a list of vices to avoid rather than an arena for growing in holiness. Our sexuality is one of the great gifts of life in a body, and like everything bodily, it can be misused and enslaved to sin; when we reduce another person to an object; when we traffic in lies or secrets; when we use sex to numb, or to grasp, or to coerce. And like everything bodily it can be used for joy, for giving and receiving vulnerability and intimacy, for knowing and being known. That is true for gay people and straight people, trans and cisgender and nonbinary people: on this last Sunday in Pride Month let's say clearly once more that the God who took on a body among us has made every single body, every shape, every orientation, every expression, capable of love and called toward sanctification.

And if “sanctification” sounds like too big and theological a word, let’s say “growing towards God,” like a plant growing toward the sun, which is the destiny every single human being has been created for. Paul doesn’t say “be holy,” as if we could do it on our own and overnight. He says “present your body parts for sanctification.” Making us holy is God’s work; ours is to invite it and to be open to it.

We are the Body of Christ; we are the bread on the altar, blessed and made holy, that we in turn might bless God’s world. Receive what you are; become what you receive.