

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Sunday, January 23, 2022
Third Sunday after Epiphany / Ecumenical Sunday

“Eureka! The Knee Bone is Connected to the Arm Bone...”

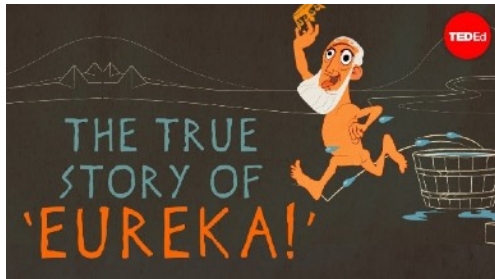
Third of three sermons in a series on Epiphany entitled “Faith’s *Eureka!*”

Christian Scripture: I Corinthians 12:12-26

A cute video before the service: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e54m6XOpRgU)

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During this series, we have learned that the word ‘*Eureka*’ is an exclamation from ancient Greece that means “I have found it!”



The exclamation is attributed to Archimedes who, when in the bath, discovered a mathematical principle attributed to volume and became so excited that he jumped-out, forgot to dress, and ran nude down the street shouting ‘*Eureka*’!



We also have learned that ‘epiphany’ can have many meanings. An epiphany can be a divine manifestation (like Jesus himself). It can be a message from a star, or an announcement from angelic messengers, or a declaration from the Holy Spirit (such as during Jesus’ Baptism). Or, an epiphany can be our own personal “Ah ha!” moment when we make a ‘God-connection’.



Last week, we talked about spiritual gifts and how they relate to one’s calling. This week, we again focus on those spiritual gifts and discover their meaning for our church.

Has anyone ever had ‘CRAPS’ before? No, am not taking about ‘the Craps’. I’m talking about ‘CRAPS’, C.R.P.S., otherwise known as ‘Complex Regional Pain Syndrome’. (I know, there is no ‘A’ in there, but doctors often call it ‘CRAPS’).



CRPS is a rare neurologic disorder that is ranked among the most painful of all medical problems and has been nicknamed the ‘suicide disease’ because there is no cure and effective treatments are limited. CRPS “is a form of chronic pain that usually affects an arm or a leg. CRPS typically develops after an injury, a surgery, a stroke, or a heart attack”.¹ Now the crazy thing about CRPS is that it “occasionally may spread from its source to elsewhere in your body, such as the opposite limb”. This is what happened to me! When I broke my right acetabulum, that is the socket bone in which the ball of the femur fits, there was no pain in my hip.



But my left foot cried out in agony; it was hot, swollen, all day and night, for weeks. Because my left foot was not injured, there was nothing that could

¹ “Complex Regional Pain Syndrome”, Mayoclinic.org, February 18, 2020.
Found at: [mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/crps-c](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/crps-c)

diminish the pain. The pain was constant and agonizing. Some nights I would just sit and cry because I felt like God was torturing me, like Job. CRPS can drive one mad. It is similar to the 'phantom' pain many amputees experience in limbs that are no longer there.



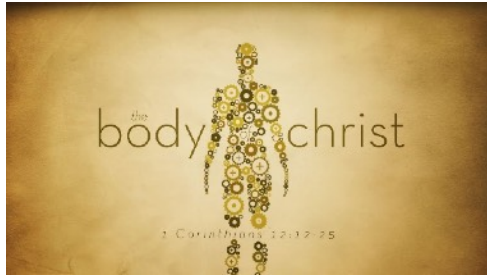
No one knows what causes CRPS. Doctors speculate that CRPS “might be due to a dysfunctional interaction between your central and peripheral nervous systems and inappropriate inflammatory responses”.² I don’t know what happened, but to me it seemed like, though directly unconnected, my foot absorbed the pain from my hip and held it as its own. Now, that’s empathy!

I am not here to ponder about medical mysteries. I am here to preach about spiritual certainties. While it is true that the hip bone is *not* directly connected to the foot bone, I learned from CRPS that that the hip bone *is* connected to the foot bone. My foot felt what my hip was - broken. And so it is in the church. Technically speaking, physically speaking, we are not physically

² “Complex Regional Pain Syndrome”, MayoClinic.org, February 18, 2020.

Found at: [https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/crps-complex-regional-pain-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20371151#:~:text=Complex%20regional%20pain%20syndrome%20\(CRPS,severity%20of%20the%20initial%20injury.](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/crps-complex-regional-pain-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20371151#:~:text=Complex%20regional%20pain%20syndrome%20(CRPS,severity%20of%20the%20initial%20injury.)

connected to each other via ZOOM during this pandemic. Yet, through the Holy Spirit and through the Body of Christ, we are in fact connected to one another.³



The apostle Paul taught “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body”. Then he continued with a comparison that is as brilliant as it is simple. Paul compared the human body to the Church and stated that just as the various parts of the body are interconnected so are the various members of church. This is one of the reasons why the church is called the ‘Body of Christ’.



³ James Price, “The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians”, *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, Charles Laymond, ed., (Nashville, Abington Press, 1971), 808.

Once in Florida, I had a terrible rash. It was crazy. Nothing would alleviate it. I went to an Urgent Care. The doctor, who by the way was a woman and very intuitive, just asked me questions about myself and my life. I thought it was just friendly chatter with which I was more than willing to engage. After the chit-chat she simply said, "There is nothing wrong with you. You can leave". I was stunned. For the first, and maybe the last, time in my life I had nothing to say. So, as instructed, I got up and departed, and, in a few paces past the door out into the world, my rash disappeared!

It turns out, there was nothing physically wrong with me. The doctor heard me tell her that I had recently been married, I just graduated from seminary, I just left my job, I just sold almost everything I had, my first born son, Micah, had just been born, I was about to leave with my bride and newborn son for Africa, and I was staying at my parents' home until we departed! The doctor concluded that my rash was psychosomatic and she sent me on my way. I somehow processed this diagnosis and when I did my rash was gone. There is no doubt that there is a relationship between the mind, body, and spirit. Bonnie Girvan and Shiva Shankarand are not inaccurate in their teachings! We are physically, spiritually, and psychologically interconnected.

I received an email from Steve and Mabel Peterson that moved me to tears this past week. I have not seen them in about two years – yet, their

correspondences of comfort, solace, understanding, and solidarity in regards to a recent sad event in my life is saturated with spiritual wisdom and love that surpasses all understanding.



I would like all of us in our church to seek ways to be more interdependent, more empathetic with one another, and more compassionate to others who are in terrible pain. When I go to assisted care facilities, I can see the wells of emotion spilling-over in people's eyes because I visited and they felt connected. Our church should be in the business of connecting people to people.

Paul makes many connections between the body and the church. There are hundreds of sermons in today's passage and last night I rattled-off a half-a-dozen or more to Sue.



Let me stick with one and end on it. I Corinthians 12:12-26 is a word of hope for everyone in this church. Paul's words are a joyful word to "those who are weak,

less respected than others, and less honored". Why? "The body needs each member and that we need especially those who are without power".⁴ Paul says that God gives greater honor to those parts that lack it so that there should be no division in the body. And to those parts that are presentable need no special treatment but are nonetheless treated with respect. So to those who are strong, respected, and honored, there is a joyful word as well! Paul argued for an 'egalitarianization' of the parts of the body and the members of the church – all should be honored and respected.

I don't usually quote poems in my messages, yet, Judy Myrick sent me gem that speaks poignantly to the truth that Paul and I preach this morning.

FITTING IN

Nobody wants to be considered
- a square peg in a round hole
- a fifth wheel
-or, God forbid, a misfit.
It's not a bad thing
To want to fit in
To a group or society
Of which there are many varieties.
But the kind of belonging
To which I mostly aspire
Is one where none are excluded.
No ins or outs.

⁴ Melinda Quivik, "Third Sunday after Epiphany", *Preaching God's Transforming Justice: A Lectionary Commentary*, Year C, Dale Andrews, Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, and Roland Allen, eds., (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 77.

No one higher or lower.
Where all that's required
Is to find the space
That's waiting for you
And then
Try to fill it.⁵

Friends, the epiphanies, the *eureka* moments for me, are when my life experience proves the truth of the Bible and the teaching of Jesus Christ.



Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that we “should all be one”⁶. (I should mention as today is Ecumenical Sunday that our denomination, the United Church of Christ is the product of four denominations’ merger.) And as I speak of the wider church, let me mention our local church and how you can help us be one. For those of you who have not submitted your pledge cards, please do so! You need to be a part of the whole because we depend on you and you depend on us. No matter whether your pledge is small or large, it is honored. As Congregationalists, no one’s money is worth more than anyone else’s. No one’s

⁵ By Van Parker.

⁶ John 17:21-23.

vote is worth more than anyone else's. We are an egalitarian society whereby we subscribe to 'the priesthood of all believers'⁷. No one is exulted above anyone else; rather, we all raise-up one another.



Likewise, with our partnership with Dummerston and West Brattleboro to host an Afghan family, we come together as equals, honoring one another, and moving forward in faith contributing what we can to the greater good.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, "Amen!"

⁷ I Peter 2:9 and I Corinthians 4:1, Exodus 19:5-6.