

Over at Immanuel, during the season of Lent, our Mid-Week evening Lenten Services, along with our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, focused on the theme of the Body of Christ. We have looked at the feet of Christ, the hands of Christ, his mouth, his ears, his eyes, heart, blood—the body of Christ—these parts and the whole body of Christ are a source of blessing for all with whom he came into contact.

With his feet he walked from one village to another, so that his hands could touch and heal. His mouth continually announced the forgiveness of sins, and it preached that the kingdom of God was near, and it proclaimed the love of a gracious parental God. His ears were tuned to hear cries for mercy from others, and his eyes were open to see their misery. His heart, full of compassion and love, again and again prompted him to use the power of God to heal and comfort people with the forgiveness of their sins, even to the point of raising the dead! Christ used the full capacity of his body to bring God's love and God's kingdom into the world.

In a simple and basic way to describe and show his love for us, at the last supper, Jesus gave his body for food and his blood for drink as he passed the bread and wine around the table.

Then he gave his body to be broken and crucified, and his blood to be poured out upon the cross.

And when he died, the body of Christ was buried, laid in a stone grave, sealed in a tomb with a great rock.

It was this same lifeless body of Christ which Mary Magdalene was seeking when she went to the tomb early that Sunday morning.

But she didn't FIND the lifeless body of Christ in the tomb! She was mentally ready to finish preparing the body of her Lord and Master for burial. Where was it? What was she to do? She ran and got Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved. Maybe they'd be able to help. They ran and came and looked, but strangely, John's gospel tells us, that's about all that happened. After all that, they went home, because they didn't yet understand the scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead. The two men went home.

But Mary stayed. She stayed, and found out something amazing. She found out that the body of Christ has risen! The body of Christ is resurrected to eternal life.

This resurrected body isn't a nebulous, hazy, ghost sort of body. It's real, because Mary was able to grab onto him as she tried to not let him go. And later that day, in John's gospel, Jesus goes and meets the disciples and greets them. And he offers them his pierced hands and side. Even Thomas, a week later, gets to

wonder as they met their risen Lord.

Those same feet of Christ, once washed by the tears of a sinful woman, were again embraced by his friends. They heard the gracious words of his mouth, and he even ate in their presence.

It is true that his body may have been changed in some way. Glorified, some might call it. More real, would be another way to describe it.

More solid than our world, maybe, for he walked through the walls behind which the disciples used to hide in fear. He stepped through those solid walls as we might step through a curtain of fog. The risen body of Christ is more permanent than the clouds of atoms and electrons which we call reality.

His body was changed to a glorious, immortal body. And because he lives, we shall live also! We are followers of Christ. Most, if not all of us, have been baptized into Christ. And since we are in Christ, we, too, shall have better, eternal bodies, when we die and are raised.

This is the good news for the day of our own death: that we will live eternally in God's kingdom because of the gracious, free gift of faith given to each of us.

But there is also good news for today, right here and now.

I think we can get at this good news by asking the question, "Where is the body of Christ now? Where is the body of Christ today?" We know that Jesus is no longer walking the dusty roads of Palestine and preaching and healing, for he was crucified and buried nearly 2000 years ago. We know the body of Christ is no longer in the tomb, either, for Mary Magdalene met the risen Christ in the garden, as this stain glass window will show us when the sun comes up this morning. And Jesus also appeared to many disciples when he was resurrected. So where is the body of Christ now?

One answer to that question would be that it is in the kingdom of God, in heaven. The book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 9, says that Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of the disciples' sight. So certainly the body of Christ is in heaven, right? But there is another answer, too.

This morning, as we've gathered together to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ here at the Madison Community Easter Sunrise Service, we've come to an empty tomb. This building used to house the group of people that called themselves the United Presbyterian Church in Madison. Today, that church no

Church is never a building. Church is people. Sure, the group of people known as the church can own and maintain a building, but never is a church strictly a building.

So, in my opinion, where we've gathered here today, for the most part, is an empty tomb. It sits empty most of the time on most weeks. And in this empty tomb, this morning, we find and proclaim something amazing. We find and proclaim that the Lord is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

That's right. Even though we gather here in an empty tomb, the amazing thing is, he is risen indeed! Alleluia! As I peer through my early morning eyes, wondering if I really am awake, I find an answer to the question, "Where is the body of Christ now?"

The Body of Christ is right here. The Body of Christ is in fact, gathered and seated in these very pews!  
**YOU are the body of Christ!**

As the feet of Christ, you walk into hospital rooms to bring the presence of God to people in need. You go to people where they are at, and through befriending them, you share the love of Christ with them. You walk into the homes of the elderly and shut-ins to bring the presence of Jesus Christ to their loneliness. You are the Body of Christ.

You are the hands of Christ, as you lay your hands upon the sick; you touch them with love and pray for them. You shake others' hands, and pull them into your conversations, as you stick a cup of coffee or something else to drink in their hands. You are the body of Christ!

You are the mouth of Christ, when you speak love, gentleness, and God's mercy to the brokenhearted and grieving. You announce forgiveness and reconciliation to those who feel the guilt of their sins and their broken ways. You are the body of Christ!

You are the ears of Christ, when you hear the cries of the sad and weary, and you respond to them. You listen patiently, for many need to express their pain, frustrations, and exhaustion. You hear them with the love of Jesus, because you are the body of Christ.

You are the eyes of Christ, when you see the weak and powerless as they suffer injustice and you become their ally and speak up for them and help them, just as Christ has become our advocate before the Father. You are the Body of Christ!

You are the heart of Christ, because the love you have is the very love of God moving inside of you.

And that love causes you to contribute generously—you give money, you give hours of labor, you share great talents and abilities for the work of Christ. It is the very heart of Christ which compels you to do such acts of compassion here in Madison and in northeast Nebraska and around the world.

You, truly, are the risen body of Christ!

As members of the Body of Christ, we must take care of one another. That is why we come together here. Only when we are all here, is the body of Christ complete. If any one of you is not here, we are not whole. Then one of the members of Christ is cut off from the body.

When we are all here, we draw strength from one another. We also draw strength from the Word, the good news of forgiveness which gives life to our body in Christ. And although we are not celebrating them here together today, we draw strength from Baptism and from Communion. Baptism gives birth to new members of Christ's Church, and Communion sustains us with the body and blood of Jesus, who is our Lord and our Head.

We need this sustenance to keep our body united, and to have the strength day after day to be the Body of Christ, bringing God's love into our world.

That is why we gather week after week in our various buildings around town, so we can keep on being the feet of Christ, the hands of Christ, the mouth, ears, eyes, and heart of Christ. That's the good news for today! We get to be the flesh-and-blood body of God's eternal love here in the world! And the good news for eternity is that we shall live with him forever, for in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 15, Paul writes, "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Alleluia! The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.