



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (B) – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Focus: *Living as God's Temple*

word of life

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Paul writes to the congregation in Corinth out of a great concern over the divisions in the church and the reports of behavior not fitting for followers of Christ. Not all Christians in the congregation have a mature faith. Some have not changed their lifestyle to reflect the priorities of Christ.

1. *What do you know about the church in Corinth?*
2. *How might the challenges facing the Corinthian congregation ring true today?*

This passage begins with what appears to be a familiar slogan in Corinth, “All things are lawful for me.” Paul adds “but not all things are beneficial.” (1 Corinthians 6:12 NRSV) Paul knows God has created the world and everything in it, but not all things are beneficial to the Christian. The example of food is given by Paul.

3. *What does the phrase “all things are lawful to me” mean?*
4. *What foods can you eat but might not be beneficial?*
5. *How can food and diets take over our lives?*

A core problem in Corinth is the lack of regard and respect of Christians for their own physical bodies. They confess Christ as Lord, but abuse their bodies. Paul is emphatic – faith in Christ involves more than the spiritual aspect of a person. God claims all of a person – even the physical body – as a member of the body of Christ.

Paul develops his theological argument by posing a series of questions, beginning in chapter two. Each question begins with a parallel phrase, “*Do you not know . . . ?*”

- “*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?*” (1 Corinthians 3:16 NRSV)
- “*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?*” (1 Corinthians 6:15 NRSV)
- “*Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her?*” (1 Corinthians 6:16 NRSV)
- “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19 NRSV)

Paul’s questioning technique reinforces his point. Our physical bodies are God’s temple, and the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us. Plus, our body is connected to both Christ as well as to the body of Christ (the church). Many of us consider our bodies to be our own personal property, but Paul argues against such thinking. God sent Christ into our world with a physical body and bought us with a price. (See 1 Corinthians 6:20.) Therefore our bodies are not ours. Consequently, Christians are not free to abuse or dishonor our body.

6. *What does it mean for you to be God’s temple?*
7. *How does it feel to consider your body as part of Christ?*
8. *Imagine the reaction by the Corinthians to Paul’s words.*

word among us

Ruby cannot remember ever being a *normal* weight for her age. She was often teased at school about her size. Ruby responded to the laughter by eating cookies when she got home. Somehow cookies made her feel better about herself. Her habits became deeply engraved. Whenever she was under stress, Ruby found cookies. And she felt better for a while.

As an adult she tried every diet possible, but those cookies continued to be a magnet. She had almost given up on changing her eating habits and had accepted the importance of cookies in her life. But then came the breakthrough. She was at worship on a Sunday listening to the lessons being read. It felt like the room emptied and God was speaking directly to Ruby as the question from Paul's letter to the Corinthians was read, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you . . . ?" (1 Corinthians 6:19 NRSV)

NO, Ruby did not know that. NO, Ruby had never considered her body as a living temple for the Holy Spirit. Ruby finally said NO to those cookies, or at least some of them.

Slowly, Ruby's life was transformed. Although she knew the facts of a healthy diet, Ruby began to apply that knowledge to her daily food choices. She even began an exercise group at her church called *Temple Trimmers*. It was really a support group for those who recognized God's temple comes in all shapes and sizes. *Temple Trimmers* became known for their loving hospitality and gentle humor.

From dawn to dusk, Ruby reminded herself of being a temple for God. Her life became a constant prayer asking God to shape and mold the temple named Ruby. Even her name made Ruby smile for the first time. How appropriate to present God a ruby – her own physical body.

1. *How do you explain Ruby's transformation?*
2. *How does it feel for you to be called God's temple?*
3. *What are the implications for you to be a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit?*
4. *What makes it difficult to remember our bodies are not our own, but the Lord's?*

faith practice in daily life

Live Among God's People

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is steeped in tips for practicing faith in daily life. He expects Christians who confess Christ as Lord to live a lifestyle reflecting that commitment. Paul challenges the Corinthian church to give glory to God in both body and spirit. The image of our body as the temple of God is especially rich.

Groups such as Ruby's *Temple Trimmers* could gather to help people claim their physical bodies as God's temple. One group might meet for an early morning jog around a park, while another group might focus on eating patterns. Youth groups might explore other issues.

5. *Brainstorm the possibilities of starting a Temple Trimmers group in your congregation.*
6. *How might we encourage each other to make healthy decisions concerning our bodies?*

Prayer

O God create in me a beautiful temple in which your Spirit dwells. Amen

last word

Remember you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Daily Faith Practices

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2012 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/faithpractices