

This scripture speaks of community in the body of Christ.
One way to read scripture is described on page 2.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (Contemporary English Version)

One Body with Many Parts

12 The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. **13** Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same Spirit.[a]

14 Our bodies don't have just one part. They have many parts. **15** Suppose a foot says, "I'm not a hand, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the foot still belong to the body? **16** Or suppose an ear says, "I'm not an eye, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the ear still belong to the body? **17** If our bodies were only an eye, we couldn't hear a thing. And if they were only an ear, we couldn't smell a thing. **18** But God has put all parts of our body together in the way that he decided is best. **19** A body isn't really a body, unless there is more than one part. **20** It takes many parts to make a single body. **21** That's why the eyes cannot say they don't need the hands. That's also why the head cannot say it doesn't need the feet. **22** In fact, we cannot get along without the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest. **23** We take special care to dress up some parts of our bodies. We are modest about our personal parts, **24** but we don't have to be modest about other parts. God put our bodies together in such a way that even the parts that seem the least important are valuable. **25** He did this to make all parts of the body work together smoothly, with each part caring about the others. **26** If one part of our body hurts, we hurt all over. If one part of our body is honored, the whole body will be happy. **27** Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body

From the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, PCUSA

As the novel coronavirus has captured the headlines in recent weeks, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and fear of the unknown have raised anxiety and caused widespread apprehension. Financial markets have wobbled and people of Asian descent in this country and around the world have been unfairly targeted. This virus has exposed the vulnerability and fragility of the global community.

As we all struggle with the horrific impact of the deadly virus that has infected so many people in China and now in a number of other countries, we cannot but call upon our God for help and healing.

Please join me in crying out for relief from this plague. We pray for healing for those who are infected, in China and in all the places where the virus has spread. We pray for all who already have lost loved ones to the illness and those who will yet suffer such loss. We pray for doctors, nurses and aides providing medical care, for insight in their caring, and for their health and well-being. We pray for wisdom for the medical and scientific experts who are desperately seeking ways to control the spread of the virus. We pray for public officials who must make the hard decisions about the quarantining of those who may have been exposed to the virus; and we pray for all those for whom those decisions feel like unjust imprisonment. We lift up the Christian church in China and our partners throughout the region as they seek to bring Christ's healing presence and peace. We pray for God to keep us alert to the threats posed by such a worldwide crisis, remembering the millions of God's children who live in places where the availability of medical care is meager or nonexistent.

May God open our hearts, our financial resources, and our political will, so that the vision of a better future can become a reality for all of God's children.

In the Providence of the God who created us, in the Passion of our Savior Jesus Christ who redeems us, and in the Power of the Holy Spirit through whom God's will is done. AMEN.

In Faith and Hope,

J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
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Martin Luther, 16th Century Christian pastor, theologian and church reformer on facing the deadly plague.

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."

— Martin Luther, from his letter "Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague" to Rev. Dr. John Hess

Here is a way of engaging in this prayer form which is relaxing and rather easy.

1. Select a passage from one of the Gospels in which Jesus is interacting with others.
2. Recall what one is doing in engaging with the Word of God and what one desires from this encounter. God is present and because God is present one relies on God.
3. Read the Gospel passage twice so that the story and the details of the story become familiar.
4. Close one's eyes and reconstruct the scene in one's imagination. See what is going on and watch the men and women in the scene. What does Jesus look like? How do the others react to him? What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words? Is Jesus touching someone? As one enters into the scene, sometimes there is the desire to be there. So a person can place oneself in the scene, perhaps as an observer, as one lining up for healing, or as one helping others to Jesus.
5. Some people's imaginations are very active so they construct a movie-like scenario with a Gospel passage. Others will enter the scene with verbal imagination, reflecting on the scene and mulling over the actions. Vividness is not a criteria for the effectiveness of this kind of prayer. Engagement is and the result is a more interior knowledge of Jesus.
6. As one finishes this time of prayer, one should take a moment to speak person to person with Christ saying what comes from the heart.

Pandemic

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

—Lynn Ungar 3/11/20

Prayer for People Critically Ill or Facing Great Uncertainty

God of the present moment,
God who in Jesus stills the storm
and soothes the frantic heart;
bring hope and courage to all
who wait or work in uncertainty.
Bring hope that you will make them the equal
of whatever lies ahead.
Bring them courage to endure what cannot be avoided,
for your will is health and wholeness;
you are God, and we need you.

-Adapted from New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 765

Believe God Hears Your Prayers by Janet Thompson

Lord, it saddens me that many people don't understand the power of prayer and even mock me for taking my worries to you in prayer. So I pray first for those who do not believe in you. Where is their hope? I'll admit that sometimes you seem silent when I so desperately want to hear from you. It's torture waiting on you, and yet I will wait because I know my prayers are not in vain. I don't know if the latest crisis will affect my family or me, but you are omniscient Lord, so I pray that you will spare us. But if fallout touches any of my loved ones, please comfort them with your healing balm. Sometimes our own choices can put us at risk. So Lord, I pray that we would all be judicious in our actions and interactions. I can remain in perfect peace because I put my future in your capable hands. Amen.

Congregation

From the moment of birth our bodies know
that life is a force at once powerful and fragile.

Thus we are given equally to fear or to hope.

In these days may we be drawn to hope.

This is a time for prayer, for all who are suffering and dying,
and those who are bringing comfort and care.

Our churches, synagogues, mosques
and gathering places are shuttered.

So we turn to the place
that is the most sacred of sanctuaries:
the quiet place within.

There, we humbly acknowledge
what we easily forget:
that we are all mysteriously woven together.

We say the words of supplication for the frail,
the old, the poor, the alone,
the anxious and afraid.

And we offer our most profound prayer,
our silent listening,
so that we may receive that grace
which we do not yet know we need.

Our ritual on behalf of one another is simple.
We know that water is a holy gift.
Let soap become our collective sacrament.

Carlo Busby March 13, 2020

Christian Affirmation of Faith

We are not alone we live In God's world.
We believe in God; who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
To celebrate God's presence,
To love and serve others,
To seek justice and resist evil,
To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
Our Judge and our Hope,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God

A Prayer of Empowerment

Empower me to be a bold participant,
Rather than a timid saint in waiting,
In the difficult ordinariness of now;
To exercise the authority of honesty,
Rather than to defer to power,
Or deceive to get it;
To influence someone for justice,
Rather than impress anyone for gain;
And, by grace, to find treasurers of joy,
Of friendship,
of peace hidden in the fields of the daily
You give me to plow.

Matthew 25:31-46 The Message

The Sheep and the Goats

31-33 “When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

34-36 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.’

37-40 “Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

41-43 “Then he will turn to the ‘goats,’ the ones on his left, and say, ‘Get out, worthless goats! You’re good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—

I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,
Sick and in prison, and you never visited.’

44 “Then those ‘goats’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn’t help?’

45 “He will answer them, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.’

46 “Then those ‘goats’ will be herded to their eternal doom, but the ‘sheep’ to their eternal reward.”

Upon reflection of this passage, where are the times, places, and circumstances where you have seen the Christ.

A Coronavirus Prayer by Kerry Weber

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us. AMEN

For Reflection in Times of Uncertainty

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The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

God makes me lie down in green pastures.

God leads me beside still waters.

God restores my soul.

God leads me in paths of righteousness[b]
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,[

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

forever.

For digital Sunday Church Services

First Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto (<https://zoom.us/j/878026231>)

First Presbyterian Church, Englewood, NJ (fpce.live)

Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago (trinitychicago.org)

UCC Austin (uccaustin.org)

Check local church websites re: worship livestream or video

