

Body of Christ: Brain

Exodus 20:1-17, Luke 6:32-38

Center Church

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“It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” Harry Potter fans may recognize this as a quote from Harry’s mentor, Albus Dumbledore. Harry was worried that his abilities as a wizard seemed to be much like the evil wizard, Voldemort. He wondered if he, too, might become evil. But Dumbledore reminded Harry that ability alone does not determine who you are. It’s how we choose to use that ability that makes the difference.

We’ve been talking this Lent about being the Body of Christ in the world, reminded that Paul says that each part of the Body is important and needed. The whole Body of Christ is not really each of us individually, but all of us together. That’s what we’re “communicating” every time we celebrate Holy Communion. Each is part of the body. No one of us is superior in every gift of serving God. We need each other to complement our gifts, the way the eye needs the hand, etc.

Each of us has a brain. The Body of Christ includes all our brains. When the secular world talks about being “brainy” or “a brain,” people often mean academic ability. Being smart at math or science or language or coding. It’s fine to be academically intelligent, and God can use that intelligence in service to the common good, but the Bible often refers to another part of the brain as more important, and it’s what Dumbledore described to Harry as what shows who we truly are. The brain controls our choices. Our brain allows us to do more than just react; when we engage our brain, we can evaluate and make choices.

This is a gift from God. Let me say that again: the ability to make choices is a gift from God. We don’t just have to follow our body’s desire or what other people are doing (when my brothers and I as kids wanted to do something because all our friends were doing it, my mom used to say to us “if your friends all ran out into traffic on the highway, would you go too?” That was her “no.” It also was her reminder that we need to think about our choices.)

We have the ability to make choices, but sometimes people deny that this is true. How many times in sexual assault cases do you hear the woman blamed because she wore what someone calls “provocative” clothing? As though the abuser had no control over the choice to assault because he saw and desired and was “provoked,” and **couldn't control himself**. Well, actually, he could. Every action we take constitutes a decision we make; either one that engages our brain or one that ignores it. Being one with the Body of Christ, a community of people struggling to live lives whose moral compass is Christ-like love, means having the support to develop the brain to make choices based on that moral compass.

And yes, sometimes those choices are difficult to make. Sometimes they are counter-cultural or counter-intuitive. One of the functions of scripture, which we can read and discuss with each other and seek to understand, is to help us make hard choices. It's not always a user-friendly book, which is why we need the Body of Christ to sort through it together. Some of the stories are there to help us see the consequences of bad choices, others to model good choices. Today's reading from Exodus, the 10 Commandments, is God laying out the kinds of choices that would lead to a society of harmony, peace, respect and safety. God knows that our brains are capable of instructing our bodies to live in this way, difficult as it may be at times.

But Jesus regularly would say, in effect, “those commandments are good, but I believe you can make even harder choices to live in deeper love.” Hence today's reading, “love your enemies. Do good and don't expect to be repaid. Don't judge other people. Forgive.” Oy! Just one of those would be hard enough, but we get all of them in a few sentences!

Here's the incredible thing: **God, the one who truly knows the capacity of the human brain, believes we are indeed capable of this!** And God gives us companions to help us when we are struggling with how to live this out in our daily life! This Body of Christ!

We live in a society today built on quick reaction. Social media thrives on people seeing something and not thinking too deeply about it and then responding. That's how the Russian bots worked to influence the last election. How many times on Facebook or Twitter has someone re-posted something that turned out not to be true? Including POTUS. But they saw it and had an immediate reaction. How rarely on social media do people

engage brain before engaging fingers on keyboards! How rarely do we remember to consider the guidelines for our choices that Jesus offered to us! How we need the Body of Christ to remind us, and to remind us that we are forgiven when we don't make loving choices, and to energize us to try again.

For some years, lots of people wore these bracelets with the letters "WWJD" on them. The letters stood for the words "What Would Jesus Do?" The idea was that this would remind you how to make choices. Okay. But our world is considerably different from Jesus' world. Perhaps a better idea is to slow down, really, slow down! Every time we are faced with a choice. Then consider how Jesus calls us to make choices in life, especially hard choices, our moral compass. Slow down and engage the brain in prayer, in thought, in evaluation, in imagination, and in connecting with God and trusted community. Slow down.

My kids all loved the Pitch Perfect movies, which came out when they were pre-teens and teens. In the first film, Beca, the main character, shouts out to her friends "Make good choices!" It became a mantra in our household, something Gavin or I would often say as they left the house each day. It was a joke, but it wasn't. It was our reminder to them, and perhaps also to ourselves, that we have the God-given ability to engage our individual and collective brains **to make good choices**. Choices that bring life, goodness, hope, justice and faithful love.

That's my closing word to you this morning: Make good choices. When the choices are hard and you need help, reach out to the other parts of the Body of Christ gathered here. Let us put our brains together, and, together and apart, **make good choices**. Amen.