

Proper 16 (21) - August 23, 2026

- Exodus 1:8-2:10 - Isaiah 51:1-6 - Romans 12:4-8 - Matthew 16:13-20

“Body of Christ?”

1. During a psychology class in college, we as students were asked to think about what our family would look like if, like actors in a play, the members of our family were standing on stage ready for a scene
 - a. I volunteered and went up to the front of our small class
 - b. I recruited fellow students and positioned them on our make-believe stage in front of everyone
 - i. There were mom and dad, holding hands, watching us closely and cheering us on. I could just as easily have placed them both kneeling and praying.
 - ii. I placed my oldest brother Rubén way off to the side, looking away, mostly because by the time I was born, he was already married and out of the house, living in Mexico City, a 10-hour drive from home
 - iii. Then came my next oldest brother Héctor, whom I look up to so much. He was front and center.
 - iv. My two older sisters Olga and Delia were together with locked arms, because they did everything together. I so wanted to fit in with their circle, but I was 10 and 12 years younger than them. No chance!
 - v. Finally my little brother Pepe and I were over to another side, face to face because we managed to fight often as kids.
 - vi. If the curtain were to go up, our family play could start.
 - vii. (Let’s give these volunteers a hand for being good sports!)
2. Our bible passages today try to help us visualize how we fit into the family of God.
 - a. Where do people think I fit in their world? Jesus basically asked them.
 - i. What was happening is that Jesus was not a character easily placed on stage in the mind of all those in first Century Palestine
 1. That was certainly true for the religious authorities
 2. From their perspective Jesus was problematic, and they would just as soon get him off stage
 3. Even the leaders and fellow participants in his own hometown synagogue had turned on him and wanted nothing to do with him

- ii. But we've also seen that the people, the regular people, were flocking to Jesus not only because he was healing miraculously, but because he was a teacher with a message unlike anything they'd heard before
 - 1. When Jesus asked "who do people say that I am?" he is basically asking where people pictured him in their lives, in the life of the community. "Where do I fit in?" he could have just as easily have asked
 - 2. And there's where we get their answers (these are the answers of those who WANTED Jesus on stage with them)
 - 3. "Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
 - 4. So what that means is that they were seeing Jesus in the classic role of a prophet, the kind of leader God sends to get people to turn their lives around, to get right with God
 - 5. What's interesting is that they named people who weren't alive anymore.
 - 6. John had been killed, Elijah, Jeremiah and the prophets had lived hundreds and hundreds of years earlier
 - 7. But that's the role they saw Jesus playing on stage: loud and proud and drawing people back to God
- iii. But Jesus then asked the disciples a more personal question: Where am I on the stage for you? Where do I fit?
 - 1. And Peter, always Peter, blurted out something which the Spirit whispered in his ear: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
 - 2. Jesus praised Peter for this comment and spoke highly of the role Peter would play in the years to come
 - 3. (But kind of bookmark this passage in your mind, because next week we read the following verses and Peter puts his foot in his mouth pretty good)
 - 4. And Jesus says – yes. That's my role on this stage, on the stage of history – the chosen one of God, the child of God, the connection with God and the connection to God.
 - 5. Now... don't tell anybody yet
- b. Years later, the Apostle Paul would seem to be picking up in that mental exercise and seeks to add his audience on that stage next to Jesus

- i. For Paul the metaphor he used is the human body, where Jesus is the head, the most important part and we, his followers, his siblings, we are scattered in function and placed in the rest of the body
 - ii. So where do we fit, Paul asks?
 - iii. If you'll let me stay with my stage metaphor while still using Paul, I'd say Paul is placing us in the context of where we feel a part of this larger story of love and forgiveness which has been playing on stage since the beginning of time
 - iv. And Paul encourages (and reminds) each of those he was writing to about their roles on the stage
 1. For the preachers, the helpers, the teachers, the counselors, the managers, the emotional caregivers, the servants to the poor, and on and on
 2. There you could picture them in your mind's eye, all around Jesus, all trying to do their part
 3. And of course all the other people in the play who may not be on stage for long, or may not have many lines
 4. There is the wise neighbor, the rebellious teen, the person overcoming addiction, the patient parent, the impatient parent, the person with all the hope in the world, the person who is stuck in despair
 5. All of them on the play, all of them with a role, all of them looking to the guidance from this misunderstood and respected teacher, this healer, this example, this Savior.
3. We as servants of God go in and out of that stage of the life of faith, learning, advancing, embracing. And we as a congregation have been growing, changing, stretching. So the question for us on a day like today with the scriptures we've read is, where do we each fit into this scene of the play, into this stretch of the faith life?
 - a. Just like a good play may have more than one act, some things change
 - b. And actors who know their parts may play this one and that one all in the same play
 - c. And of course, like any play, there are people who get to be on stage, but there are the needed characters behind the scenes, and even those who take turns waiting for their time on stage
 - d. Having a role in this play of the life of faith where God has placed us is helpful
 - e. And we get to benefit from the unique gifts each of us brings to the playing of the parts

- f. We also benefit from encouraging each other to get involved as our gifts are utilized in our common ministry.
4. Here we all are, all in this life of faith, this kind of spiritual play. We each bring rich gifts and experiences. We are called to ask ourselves what role Jesus plays in our lives, and what role we play alongside Jesus on this stage. We collaborate with all those on stage and behind the scenes in whatever role God has given us, always remembering to take our lead from Jesus, who stands front and center.

Questions for Reflection

1. Think back to a time when you were in a play (maybe at school or church or at home), and share what you remember about it.
2. Consider the reading in Romans 12:4-8 and ask yourself how God has invited you to use your gifts to help others?
3. Where are new and old ways in which you would want to get involved in the life of the church or of the community?