

Health and Human Service Sunday

United Church of Christ

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
January 26, 2025

[Neh. 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#)

[Psalm 19](#)

[1 Cor. 12:12-31a](#)

[Luke 4:14-21](#)

Greeting

Today, we gather together with the whole United Church of Christ in observing Health and Human Service Sunday. We bear witness to the tradition, and the history being made today, of how the UCC has expressed extravagant welcome through service within and beyond our church walls. We take time to honor the 400-member site locations of the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, those serving as chaplains and parish nurses, those working for justice and care in the ministries of health and wellness, gender and sexuality, disabilities, mental health, harm reduction, and HIV/AIDS. We praise God for the ways these disciples embody the Good News of freedom and compassion alongside those impacted by structural violence—whether that be by a lack of housing or healthcare, stigma and shame, or harmful beliefs and policies. We give thanks to the Spirit for remembering how Jesus chose to spend his time in his ministry—in healing, in community, and in service. Amen.

Call to Worship

One: O God of All Bodies, of those made of flesh and those made of stars,

All: of those with fins, fur, or feathers, and those of minerals and weather.

One: O God of All Bounty, of leaves and seas, of space and sky, we come to you as many.

All: We come as part of you, present and ready.

One: As the inhale rises and the exhale releases, we come as one full breath.

All: With some of us coming up for air for the first time this week, this month, this year.

One: Some of us laying down a weight, a moment, a grief, a fear.

All: Just as the universe expands and contracts, we gather here with all our comings and goings,

One: to worship the One of Cosmic Circulation and Spirals, leaving Your mark

All: in galaxies, in fingerprints, in a snail shell sitting on a billion-year-old rock. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Divine Body of Belonging, grant us the tenderness of feeling safe in your arms, the stability of being tethered by both gravity and grace. Help us not to resist this moment nor our mortality. You've given us this life on earth with terrains of varied lands and feelings, guide us to navigate this being human, this being a body made in your image and likeness. Amen.

Preparation for Scripture Meditation

***Facilitator Note:** You're invited to add a sensory component to this meditation by finding something you have easily available that is about the size of an almond to pass out to folks. (For allergy safety reasons, having real almonds or nuts is not recommended.) Some examples include pebbles, pieces of playdough that folks can form into a ball or oval shape, or small cotton balls. If you do not have a sensory item or are facilitating this with folks online, you can simply skip the part of the meditation that prompts them to use the item or edit this in any way that works for you and your setting.*

Our tradition shows us that there is wisdom in our bodies and teaches us that we are made in the image of God. In today's scripture passage, Paul reflects on the church as the Body of Christ—particularly in how the members of the body care for and are connected to one another. To prepare us for this reading, let us spend a few minutes in prayer with our bodies. I'll guide us through a brief meditation on a small but vital part of our bodies—one that has been working overtime for many of us.

From the Greek word for almond, the amygdala is part of a larger network in your brain called the limbic system, which regulates emotions, behavior,

motivation, and memory. The amygdala is most known for its role in processing the emotions of fear and anxiety as well as detecting danger.

However, research also shows that the amygdala contributes to much more than just fear-based survival instincts and stress. It also plays a key role in social communication and understanding one another, in the emotions related to parenting and caregiving, and in the feelings we connect to our memories.

Using the (*say the sensory item you have provided*), imagine that you are holding your amygdala in your hands—or perhaps imagine God’s hands doing so. As you do this, I invite you to reflect on all that your amygdala has been holding, carrying, processing, and protecting for you. It might be working overtime on handling stress, worry, overwhelm, or heartbreak. It might be helping you to love more deeply, understand more broadly, remember more wholly. It could be all of the above. What might it want you to know or see? Just take some time to honor this unique part of your body without trying to change, fix, or judge it. Acknowledge with tenderness all it has been holding for you lately. Hold your amygdala as it has held you.

(Offer time of silence or instrumental music)

Careful and Caring Creator, we ask that you bless our beautiful brains and complex bodies as a whole. We lift up the part of us that experiences both fear and compassion, anxiety and deeper understanding, feeling and forecasting. Help us to learn to listen to the wisdom of our bodies and to the connective tissue that lives between us through you. Amen.

A Prayer of Peace for All Bodies

By Rev. Amy Johnson

Minister for Sexuality Education & Justice for the United Church of Christ

Holy Creator and Author of Life,
We pause amidst the busyness of our days to
Still our bodies
Hear our hearts beat
Feel breath move in and out of us with your Spirit.
We pray for peace for all bodies.

For bodies ravaged by legislation removing choices
For bodies needing care that have been villainized and vanquished
For bodies healing from physical, emotional, spiritual, medical and political assault
For bodies shamed and stigmatized for their size, their shape, their parts, their color, their experiences

We pray for peace for all bodies.

For young bodies, old bodies, teen bodies, middle aged-bodies, bodies of all ages

For black bodies, brown bodies, indigenous bodies, asian bodies, latine bodies and bodies descended from every corner of the globe and all ethnicities and cultures

For queer bodies and intersex bodies and cis bodies, disabled and abled bodies, bodies of faith and those who have lost faith or never had any to begin with

We pray for peace for all bodies.

And we remember, how you created humanity in your image, with abundant diversity

And as you breathed breath into each of us in the beginning

You declared every single body to be very good.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

One: Our scripture reminds us that, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' any more than the head can say to the feet, 'I do not need you.' And even those members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable" (1 Cor. 12:22).

All: And yet, how often do we say such things in our words, thoughts, actions, inactions, or lack of concern?

One: Our scripture further reminds us that we are called to bring Good News to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, healing to the suffering, and freedom to the oppressed (Lk. 4:18).

All: And still, the work of the Gospel remains ongoing, daily, as well as sturdy ground to journey upon.

One: O God of Restoration, help us to embody our place in the Body of Christ that we may live into its honor and care and share in its joy and belonging. Amen.

Invitation to Offering

Howard Thurman once said, "There are two questions that we have to ask ourselves. The first is 'Where am I going?' and the second is 'Who will go with me?'" As we come to this time of offering, let us take a moment to pause to remember our mission, our role in that mission, and the networks of communities that bring it to life. Out of this place of awareness and clarity, what gifts are we called to bring forth today? To follow up on? To collaborate with? To offer in another future season? Bless our discerning hearts and gifts, O God of Abundance, that they may bring forth the Gospel. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving

We offer up to you these gifts of time, energy, resources, skills, and connections. We lovingly place the power of showing up before you and trust that you will multiply it into a profound sense of your presence moving within, around, and beyond us. Guide us in right-relationship with these offerings that we may use them for a just world for all. Amen.

Communion Prayer

O God of Caves and Communion Tables, as we gather around your altar, we remember the ancient marks of our ancestors—the hands pressed upon the walls of caves, echoing through time and bearing witness to community and hope.

We see their stories, etched in shadow and stone. Hands of the elders, guiding with wisdom. Hands of children, lifted high on the shoulders of kin. To tell us that they were there, that they reached for the heavens, that they could touch an unknown future, through us today.

As we break the bread and share the cup, we recall how Christ, like those ancient elders, lifts us up. How we too, may be raised to new life through extravagant belonging and presence in the moment.

May this bread, connect us to cosmic time, to tie us to the Body of Christ in the offering hands of those long ago and of future descendants yet to become enfleshed.

May this cup replenish us to share in our longings, so that the Good News may leave its mark in us and on the walls of the world. Amen.

Bodies Blessing Bodies Benediction

One: May our bodies, O God, become living benedictions. May we find ourselves in the Body of Christ, the Good Word made Flesh dwelling among us still.

All: May we be guided to digest life's foods and flavors.

One: Learning how to process and break things down—a grain of rice, an idea, an experience, a structure, a dynamic. Grant that we may protect that which nourishes and remove all that harms or that which simply must be let go. Let us taste and see that God is good.

All: May we be granted the strength to move with—not against—the marrow and moments of life.

One: Offering power and muscle to do the work of justice and the privilege to be of service and support. Let us remember that our God stands with us and puts flesh on dry weary bones.

All: May we be blessed with the breath of life and hearts on fire for love of the world.

One: Infusing life-force energy into our relationships and receiving it in return. To be courageous enough to feel the full range of emotions each day may bring. Let us remember that we are not called to live or feel through this life alone.

All: May we go forth from this place as God with skin on.

One: Showing up with compassion, protecting from infection, regulating and sensing the changes of life. Let us remember that God clothes us with righteousness and kinship.

All: In every cell, sinew, and tissue, in every bone, nerve, and hormone, may we call ourselves beloved.

One: Created in the image of our Creator, let us be God enfleshed,

All: joining in the shared breath of life's joys and sorrows, one body and spirit, together in Christ. Amen.

For more information about The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, UCC, please visit: www.chhsm.org

For more information about Health and Wholeness advocacy, please visit: <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/>

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