

CMCL
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Genesis 1:27, 31

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them. God saw all that He had created and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Lev 15:2

Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, when any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean

Lev 15:19

When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days: and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.

Numbers 19:13

Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself... he shall be unclean;

Deuteronomy 28:4

Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

Deuteronomy 28:18

Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

Matthew 5:29

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you: for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matthew 14:22

While they were eating, He took some bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take it: this is my Body."

Luke 11:34

The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body is also full of light; but when it is bad, your body is also full of darkness.

Romans 8:13

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

1 Corinthians 6:19

Or do you not know that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

1 Peter 2:24

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness: for by His wounds you were healed.

Luke 11:36

If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays.

I Sing the Body Electric

Walt Whitman

I have perceiv'd that to be with those I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,
To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough,
To pass among them or touch any one, or rest my arm ever so lightly round his or
her neck for a moment, what is this then?
I do not ask any more delight, I swim in it as in a sea.

There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and in
the contact and odor of them, that pleases the soul well,
All things please the soul, but these please the soul well.

Sermon March 18, 2018

Today we are going to continue our study of spiritual practices by looking at the body- and what role our physical bodies might play in our movement toward god. But the body- even the word- is a tough thing- our relationship to it- what we have been taught about our bodies- from scripture and from our culture, as well as what we tell ourselves every day. I understand that issues around ones body can be painful for some of us- and I enter into this conversation with the hope that our time together this morning leaves us feeling a little bit more freedom around our bodies, and a little less shame.

I'm going to begin with a poem by Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine-sister in Arkansas- I discovered Macrina in the late 1990s- through her book, A Tree Full of Angels- and it has forever changed my life, and my understanding of this connection between humanity and divinity.

This poem is called ...

Frail and Glorious

The waters of baptism flowed over me
and no original sin was seen.
Rather, the Eye of God beheld
a tiny mass of bones and flesh
soul and spirit
infinite possibility
pure process
new, empty, and free,
free to choose
good or evil
light or darkness
life or death
grace or sin.

It was my original union
I was passing through the baptismal waters
being filled with power like unto God's
and God wept
at the possibility of me.

Then somewhere in between my baptism
and my daily life
My power like unto God's became scattered
I forgot my original union with God
And as I grew
I chose
good and evil
light and darkness
life and death
grace and sin.

With my baptism lost
I began to live my life fragmented
standing on the edge of my baptismal powers
blind to their presence in the depths of my soul.

Yet all fragments are finally gathered up
and God does in us wonders
that others are not able to do.

So on a day that felt like baptism

God gave me a glimpse of my hidden splendor
made me aware of that original union
and my powers that had become scattered
Now my life is ever spent
in calling home my scattered powers.

Let us pray-
Holy God- we come to this time in this place with our
hands open to receive –
the love of this community- the acceptance and tolerance we know here
-the beauty and integrity... with which this community lives and moves.
And yet we too have our limitations.
We come to this place with our hands open to see the truth of who we are- The ugly
as well as that which is beautiful.
The truth of our weaknesses and failures-
And the truth of the greatness of which we are capable.
Because God- we know, the myth of our lives tells us that you look at creation and
call it very good.

In the name of Jesus, who is hope and truth and life-
Amen.

I invite you all to close your eyes and do a little body awareness exercise with me- if
you are comfortable.
Take a deep breath filling your lungs all the way down to your belly button- and
hold it for a careful pause before slowly exhaling.

As you exhale, try to be aware of where in your body the tensions grasp hold...Take
another deep breath.

Maybe the tension is in your shoulders and neck-
As you exhale, try to breathe some of that tension away.
Maybe you carry tension in your hips and lower back.
Continue your breathing and focus your mind on that area as you breathe, exhaling
into those tight muscles.
Perhaps for you, it is in your jaw and teeth.

Take one more deep breath, and exhale slowly-
then I invite you to open your eyes again- (or not-)

Our bodies are amazing in that they tell us how we are doing,
On so many levels- emotionally, physically, psychologically-

If only we listen. But we are out of practice in listening to our bodies –

I've been preparing for this sermon over the past few weeks-

thinking about spiritual practices -and how my body is a part of my own daily prayers and runs and yoga and other meditations- and I've been wondering how to share with other people about how to allow embodied prayer to move in us- and I realized I was asking the wrong question.

Rather-

How can we freely use our bodies in our spiritual practices-

When those same bodies are a source of shame for us.

Or when we believe our bodies should be blamed for the source of our sinfulness?

What it comes down to is- we have a problem with our physical bodies in our American – Christian culture.

Some of you may have grown up learning that the body is sinful and unclean. That sex makes you unclean, and therefore the body and desires of the flesh- are things to be ashamed of.

And that juxtaposed with messages oversexualizing the body- particularly women's bodies- in our everyday lives- via TV shows, advertisements, billboards, magazines, as well as the language we use in everyday life. Your body is not good enough- is the overwhelming message we are bombarded with.

We could all feel a little schizophrenic –

On the one hand trying to fit in with the culture's expectations of being sexy and making our bodies fit particular expectations and sizes – while also trying to listen to the rules of our parents, our Sunday school teachers, our churches by denying ourselves the desires of the body because it leads to sin and separates us from god.

Is it any wonder we dissociate our bodies - from our spirit- our spirituality and- our spiritual practices?

Many of you are already on this path of integrating your body into your spiritual life- but if you are anything like me, it is constant work.

And spiritual practices do help.

A retraining of the mind to think differently about the body.

A practice of inviting the body into the motion of prayer.

Kathleen Norris has a really small book called “quotidian mysteries.” It was from her that I began the integration of my body into my prayer life- through doing the laundry and washing the dishes and other work she calls “women's work”- but I would call the necessary work of living, for which we are all responsible. She uses the daily, quotidian acts of life as bodily spiritual practices that give her space to meditate and listen to god.

My own transformation from shame of the body to celebration of this amazing vessel in which all that I am dwells- has come over years of struggle.

But at the core of such an integration is the incarnation.

Belief in the incarnation. That incarnation is possible- one of the truest messages of the bible for me is God becoming flesh.

In Jesus- yes- but also in all of humanity- in you and in me.

Macrina was the catalyst for my coming to this conclusion that-

All of humanity is both beautiful- and ugly at the same time- able to do powerfully good things and at the same time able to inflict harm on one another. Human and divine.

But the paradox- or the incredible sense of humor god has- is that we can be all of these things at once- and to embrace it all- my beauty and my ugly- your beauty and your ugly- brings a freedom in our relationships to the body that allow us to open to the powers of god to move in us and through us more freely.

And that allows us to live in love more freely in the world.

You heard the messages scripture can give us-

The body is unclean- if you are bleeding, if you touch someone or something dead, if you have sex-

Your body is cursed because of certain behaviors.-and if certain parts of your body cause you to sin- cut those parts off.

But there are other messages from Scripture that tell a different story.

Jesus broke bread and said "Take this and eat, it is my body"- a life giving act.

Your body is the temple of God. And not just a shell in which something foreign inhabits for a time- but incarnation- transformative presence of God. Right here (gesture).

When we are able to embrace and accept our bodies- we become more aware of the role they play in our mindfulness, meditation, and overall health. That means the condition of our bodies- and our relationship to those bodies, also affect our ability to be open to God.

So- The Body-

Our bodies- both frail and glorious.

But our frailty doesn't have to cripple us-

And our glory doesn't have to be hidden.

I'm gonna say that again.

Our frailty doesn't have to cripple us

and our glory doesn't have to be hidden.

And my dear Mennonite friends, I will go a step further for you and say- to reveal the truth about who you are, no matter how beautiful that truth is- is not a sin. It is possible to live in the beauty of who you are without being arrogant or showy about it.

I want you to close your eyes again-
Let's do a different practice with our bodies.
Let's do a meditation of celebration.
Take a deep breath – and as you do- I want you to reach as high as you can- just feeling the power in your arms moving up toward the sky.
Work out any kinks in your shoulders – in your elbows and wrists.
Do little twists and moves – and become aware of the powerful life that is revealed as you draw attention to the power in your body.

These are the arms that do the work of God in the world. These are the arms that make your meals and drive you to work and church and the grocery store. These are the hands that touch and love one another.

Now bring your arms down and place them on your legs. Continue to take slow deep breaths in and out as you do this.

Become aware of your feet touching the floor in front of you- let them be solid- like roots growing down into the earth and providing a foundation that is stable and true. This is your foundation- your grounding-from which you move.

Take one or two more breaths and spend a minute being aware of other parts of your body that call out to you- for awareness and make a mental note so you can revisit those places later today.

Listen to what your body is telling you about those spaces. (and you can open your eyes again)

I'll just add that for me- any kind of practice that allows me to move the body while I am meditating and listening to god, brings awareness to the body- stretching, walking, folding laundry, running, yoga... breathing. The integration of awareness of the physical body can happen at any level of physical capability.

I invite you to allow your body to enter into your religious life in a way that the glory of it shines, right next to the reality of its frailty.

As we read in Luke 11

If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays.

³³ "No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁶ If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays."

Let us – then- allow our bodies to be wholly illumined –with awareness and acceptance- as we continue to walk toward God.

I am going to close as we began today- with the rest of the words from Macrena's poem- Frail and Glorious...

O frail and glorious creature
whoever you are,
cherish this truth
there are hints of glory in your being
seeds of splendor
traces of holiness

To be divinized is your destiny.
Your original union yearns for a place in your life.
Walk gently then with your frailty
Allow it to bless you.
It will not cripple you
unless you run from it.
Embrace it instead.
Carry it as one carries
the cherished secret of a great wealth
hidden away in a holy, eternal space
like a treasure hidden in a field.

That's you!
You fragile, noble being
Little-Great-One
Yes, there are whispers of greatness
in the frail envelope of your being.

The dust of the Ash Wednesdays of your life
is tinged with the glory of your Easters.
Your tomb is a womb of life
you are hidden with Christ in God
The dust of your life fades into glory.

O frail and glorious creature
from the crib to the cross
to be divinized is your destiny.
Your original union cries out
to become flesh in your life.
Your frailty and your glory
Your littleness and your greatness
yearn to come home in your heart.

The heavens have heard
whispers of your splendor
and God still weeps at your birth.

Sited:

A Tree Full of Angels, Macrina Wiederkehr
Quotidian Mysteries, Kathleen Norris
I Sing the Body Electric, by Walt Whitman
Various scripture verses on the body- New American Standard Version