

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

In my experience, we don't talk a lot about the body in church. Some traditions do more, I think, but not one I've ever participated in actively. Certainly in our discussions of morality, things that our traditions think that *we* should or should not do with our bodies come to be hotly debated. But I don't think we talk a lot about personal experience, and, more specifically, bodily experience in our discussions of faith and spirituality. Yet, aside from general social discomfort with talking about bodies, I'm not at all certain why it's not something we talk about, for a number of reasons. Now, I hope I'm breaking out new information here, but we all of us here have bodies. And we believe in a God who became embodied! As if that were not enough reason, Furthermore, this lack seems odd because of readings like we have today: Not only does it seem TO ME that bodily experience is important, but it seems to me that it seems to SCRIPTURE that bodily experience is important!

In our short psalm today, we have longing and near despair “how long?” and “o that we might see some good” and these are very abstract images: time and good. But then the psalmist brings us back to the body: “let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord.” Now, in spite of the weather on Friday, we are entering into the season of days getting longer, and light returning to the northern hemisphere, and I don't know about you, but I have spent many moments outside, looking up, closing my eyes and feeling the light on my face. There is the warmth of the sun too, but even through closed eyes we know when light is shining on our faces. The psalmist tells us this image of light on the face is how we might begin to think about walking in God's grace—it is like walking with the light perpetually shining on us. And gladness, the psalm says that God puts gladness in our hearts—again, a feeling that we know, but which comes back to the body: “more than when grain and wine abound.” Fun fact, the translation of this Psalm I'm more familiar with reads “more than when grain, and wine, and oil increase.” I tracked that down and it turns out that the Hebrew scriptures read “grain and wine” and the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Hebrew scripture written between the 3rd and 1st century BC, contains grain and wine and oil. It makes me wonder if something changed in the people's access to oil between the time of the psalmist and of the Greek translation. I like the inclusion of oil, because not only is oil food, like grain and wine, so this gladness is the gladness of being well fed, of not wanting for our bodily needs, but oil is also so important to the outside of our bodies. As the Israelites in their arid climes, so too for us coming out of a long artificially heated winter: the one who translated this psalm into Greek knew the

feeling of an abundance of a good moisturizer! This comparison of sensory bodily experience of light, and fullness, and dare I say skin care to the experience of God's grace gives depth to the image, it gives us an experience that most of us have had in our bodies to hold on to, to hang that feeling on.

And the letter of John today... we hear from the third chapter, but recall that the letter of John begins: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life —" heard, seen, looked at, touched: the author of John is clearly asking us to believe his own bodily lived experience, his own experience of the divine. Today's passage continues "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." This one word that happens twice: revealed, comes from the infinitive "φανερόω" "to make manifest." Now, indulge me a moment in some more etymology: that "fan" sound in φανερόω might be familiar from the word "Epiphany" and indeed it's the same root. Ἐπι - φαίνω, "epi" upon, and φαίνω, an older verb than φανερόω means "to appear, to bring to light, show, uncover, reveal" and it in turn comes from the Proto-Indo-European meaning simply "to shine." All the way back in the chain of meaning, it's a bodily sensory experience: when Jesus is again revealed. When Jesus is brought to light before us. When Jesus is shown to us, then we will see him as he is. We will see him as he is because revealing is light-bringing. As John writes elsewhere, "God is light" "θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν" Φῶς as in phosphorescent or phosphorus means light and traces itself back to that same proto-Indo-European root meaning "to shine." God shines. God illuminates. God reveals.

Which brings us, of course, to Luke, and to the disciples so frightened that Jesus has come among them that Jesus himself suggests that they think that he is a ghost! (I always picture this scene with Jesus rolling his eyes. Hello! Not a Ghost! What do I have to do here? Do you have some fish? Will that do it?) So Jesus asks for and eats a piece of fish to prove his corporeality. There were schools of early Christian thought that believed that Jesus never had a body at all, that he only appeared to be human, that the incarnation was an illusion and that God speaking through Jesus was no more solid than God speaking through a pillar of cloud. And if there were people who thought that of Jesus' earthly ministry than surely there were more who believed it about his resurrected body. Including, it seems, for a time, his own disciples. Last week we heard about Thomas, deeply embodied Thomas. Thomas who needed to believe with his own body. And here we have Jesus

proving with his body, that he had a body. Spending time with both the group of disciples in Luke and with Thomas in John, Jesus knows—perhaps for the very reason of *being* embodied—that sometimes we need to know something in and with our bodies before we really know it. We count on our fingers when we are unsure of a number (I kid you not, I did that 2 days ago. I had to confirm for myself 3 times by counting decades on my fingers that my next high school reunion was my 30th). We practice things—dance, driving, art, sports—until we achieve muscle memory, a memory that lives in our bodies and hardly requires our minds at all to unlock it. We waste away as babies if we are not touched enough. The tiniest scent can unlock a world of memory. The first chord of a beloved song brings to us the entire song at once, and the situations of the various times we’ve heard it. We humans experience knowledge in our bodies as much as our minds, and we believe with our bodies as much as with our hearts.

The apostles bore witness to what they had seen, and heard, and touched, and felt. And so do we. What we see and hear and touch and feel is different, but we too have direct experience of God. So on the one hand, that is why we have to say experience, because our direct experiences with God sometimes feel like a taboo subject. It can be really hard to talk about direct experience with God, and yet that is why so many of us are here, why we come here, why we come back, because of one moment in time, or repeated moments, when God has in some way said to us: “I am here with you.”

Here we are, deep into the midst of Eastertide, hopefully nearing the end of COVIDtide, and in some limited ways, we begin to be able to celebrate with our bodies. It has been a long and lonely year for most bodies. I am here in town because, now that vaccines have made it possible again, it was important to bring my body to New York for the celebration of my mother’s birthday, the celebration of 75 years embodied. To hug, now that we can. We bring our bodies together for celebration, and for mourning as well—many of us have had to miss in person funerals as well, and the physical acts of consolation that come with them. But we can celebrate that we are alive, that we are embodied, that every single one of our bodies was made in the image of God, who himself also had a walking, talking, fish-eating body. Give thanks for the food that nourishes your God-image body. Feel the light of Christ on your face, and rejoice. Alleluia, Amen.

Texts for April 18, 2021

- [Acts 3:12-19](#)
- [1 John 3:1-7](#)
- [Luke 24:36b-48](#)
- [Psalm 4](#)



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