

Welcome. Welcome friends. Welcome acquaintances. Welcome strangers. Welcome community. Welcome all. Welcome.

Welcome all. Welcome to all. Welcome to all of you. AND Welcome to all of you. Welcome to you who dream like Jacob. Welcome to you who are but dust. Welcome to you who are flourishing like a flower of the field. Welcome to you who have wrestled and fought with the devil. Welcome to you who have wrestled and fought with *your* devils. Welcome to you who are still wrestling. Welcome to you sitting beneath an increasingly violent beech tree, wishing you were sitting beneath the fig tree. Welcome to you who see the angels of God ascending and descending.

Welcome to your doubts and your fears. Welcome to your uncertainty and your certainty. Welcome to your anxiety and your trust. Welcome the bright steadfastness of your faith and welcome the dark night of your soul.

Welcome to all of you. Welcome to your hands and feet. Welcome to you knees and toes. Welcome to your bodies and your blood and your guts and all of your flesh. Welcome to all of your assistive devices.

I want to start with bodies. We decided on a processional today because one of the things that attract some of us to this tradition is the ways that we can use our body in worship. I came from a very seated worship tradition. Come in. Sit. Stand to sing. Sit again. Stand. Exit. When I encountered this world of not just sitting, not just standing, but also kneeling, bowing, or... bowing, hands together, genuflecting, orans hands, hands upraised, the sign of the cross I found a place where I felt: It is okay to have a body. It's okay to have *my* body! And our bodies can be used to glorify God through something other than sitting very... very... still. And there is nothing wrong with sitting very, very still! We know that God speaks lavishly into stillness. But sitting still is one thing, And as I delved deeper into this, my adopted tradition, I soon felt that the wild diversity of *things we can do* is all about welcome.

Processing, kneeling, raising hands these embodied rituals tie our bodies together with our experience of the divine. And at various points, they have come under attack in our tradition. Perhaps our Dean will be gratified by the extent to which the theme of this week's worship was

inspired by his lectures in Books of Common Prayer—we moved through the outlawing and dissolution of the monasteries, the outlawing of litany processions, and the suppression of various devotional practices that were killed on the basis that they were superstitious, or unorthodox, or—it seems to me—sometimes because they were *enjoyed* by the people!

Tom Lehrer, songwriter, satirist, mathematician and consummate snob once remarked (and to be clear, I disagree with both his premise and his conclusion) that the reason folk music is so very bad is that it was written he would groan *by the people*. And it's easy to get the impression that, in some circles, we collectively have felt that way about popular religious practice. In spite of them appearing in our liturgy—this morning we heard in the Te Deum “To thee all Angels cry aloud” and in every Eucharist we hear “therefore with angels and archangels,” something like “a belief in Angels” is sometimes relegated to a “popular religious practice.”

Calling something “popular religious practice” might not put quite as fine a point on it as Lehrer did. Yet, it can feel actually worse—as though it were better *such things* not be mentioned at all. And though we have ample evidence that God speaks in silence, I don't know how much room we leave for God's voice in our silent disdain.

And that disdain for the things that “the people” do with their bodies to worship God, or the stories that people tell about their faith is silencing, it is shaming, and it is not worthy of the lavish, elaborate, embarrassing welcome that Jesus calls us to. Jesus taught by telling stories—and not all of them easy to understand—and in today's story he tells us that “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending.” I haven't, myself, seen that. The author of Revelation tells more fantastical stories, battles in heaven and dragons slain. And those stories can sometimes seem a little... well... there be dragons, stay away.

But let's take the way we use this phrase overseriously for a moment. There *be dragons*: we use the phrase for that which is out there, beyond whatever is our own personal pale. Put another way, there be dragons is where mystery lies. And no amount of Enlightenment rationality has, nor do I believe that any amount of scientific discovery ever will untangle every single mystery in the universe. We may use sometimes “mystery” to mean simply something we don't know: for example, it remains true that the workings of Calculus are a mystery to me. However, Calculus *is known*, Calculus is *knowable*. There be not dragons. There be math class.

We can tell stories not only to explain away mystery as to inhabit mystery more deeply. I had to learn to stop shying away from the book Revelation because to shy away from Revelation is to shy away from... Revelation. It is to deny that in the contemplation of mystery, both something new may be revealed and that mystery will persist. Denying mystery is not worthy of the life of prayer that we are called to. Denying bodies their full incarnate lives is not worthy of the life of prayer we are called to. Something different, mysteriously so, happens to me when I pray like this, or like this, or like this, or when I pray a litany promenading down Canner Ave. What I do with my body changes how I encounter mystery, stories, Jesus.

And as we celebrate St. Michael and all angels, and we prepare to sing with Michael and Gabriel and the hosts of heaven Holy Holy Holy, we celebrate the lavish, elaborate, embarrassing hope we share in the mysterious communion of the saints and angels who pray for us, who slay dragons for us, who reveal, who remain mysterious.

And so also on this Matriculation Wednesday, I want to end as I began. Welcome. Welcome first years just finding their ways around. Welcome second years who spent their first year strangely *disembodied* from their the storytelling experience that is school. Welcome back to all the bodies. To all the practices you bring with you. To all the practices you're open to learning. To all the practices you try and find they don't work for you. To all the stories you bring to tell. To all the stories you hear and repeat. To all the stories that reveal great truth. To all the stories that help you dwell deeper in mystery. Welcome all to all your experiences of our all in all.

- [Genesis 28:10-17](#)
- [Revelation 12:7-12](#)
- [John 1:47-51](#)
- [Psalm 103 or 103:19-22](#)



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