

# Sermon for Sunday, September 26, 2021 - "Tending the Body"

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our Gospel reading today is so harsh, even grotesque. I appreciate the words of author Barbara Brown Taylor who writes, "The one thing I like about this text is that it defines the limits of Biblical literalism. Walk into the most Bible-believing church you can find – where the women do not wear trousers or speak in church, where the men do not swear oaths or mow their lawns on Sunday – go into a place as strict as that and I bet you won't find many people with eye patches and wrapped stumps, because even the most literal Christians balk at this passage."<sup>1</sup>

Sharing that quote feels like a bit of comic relief with this hard text. Yet I'm also struck by how easily I poke fun at Christians who believe differently than I do. I'm as bad as the disciples at the beginning of our passage today. Even if this passage isn't to be taken literally, it is one we should take seriously. When we are tempted to fixate on what everyone else is doing wrong, Jesus calls us to take a good, long look at ourselves.

As I've been trying to do that this week; in praying with this text, I found this reflection by Pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes to be helpful. He writes:

"The hand that causes you to stumble is not at the end of your arm. It's deeper than that. What is the hand in you that reaches for what is not yours? Cut it off. There is nothing you need to grasp.

"What is the eye in you that does not look with love? Pluck it out. The eyes of love are good enough.

"What are the feet in you that won't trust, that lead you away from the path of love? Cut them off. You don't need to go there.

"Does it sound harsh? Don't worry, they're not part of the real you. Besides, they'll grow back.

"The Teacher is not asking you to maim yourself. He is inviting you to name what interferes, and to take away its power. He's leading us out of the unquenchable fire of our fears, desires, and attachments.

"Without our grasping, fearful, compulsive parts, perhaps then we will rely more on the eyes and hands and feet of Jesus.

"This pruning is how we become whole."

These words express what I hope will happen for us as a congregation through the racial justice

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels* (Cowley Publications, 1997), 118.

work we're doing together.

We need to name the ways racism and white supremacy impact this congregation.

We need to be led out of the hell on earth that we perpetuate and experience in a world so impacted by racism.

We need to be pruned.

We need Jesus to free us and guide us.

Pastor Garnaas-Holmes' words help us to see that our problems are deeper than our physical bodies. Yet, especially when it comes to racism, it's also important to pay attention to our actual bodies because our bodies internalize all the trauma and all the history that gets wrapped up into the word race.

I'm learning about this from Minneapolis based trauma specialist Resmaa Menakem. I've listened to his *On Being* interview with Krista Tippett three times and I'm now listening to his book *My Grandmother's Hands*. He has such wisdom about how bodies are impacted by racism. Menakem has learned that our bodies carry racialized messages even when we don't intentionally choose them. He's found that, "The white body feels that it is fragile and vulnerable ... it sees Black bodies as dangerous and needing to be controlled; yet, also, as potential sources of service and comfort." And, "The Black body sees the white body as privileged, controlling, and dangerous."<sup>2</sup>

These messages shape us on visceral, unconscious levels. These messages lead white bodies to, for instance, clutch bags tighter when on an elevator with a Black body or cross to the other side of the street when a Black body is approaching. They lead white teachers to notice Black kids acting out much more often than white kids doing the same things.

This means that racism shapes how we use our hands, feet, and eyes - the very body parts Jesus asks us to tend to in our Gospel reading today. And this means we can't just tackle racism by looking at concepts and ideas. We can't think our way out of this problem. We need to engage it at a deeper level.

So today we aren't going to have an intellectual discussion about the draft racial justice statement. We'll do that too, but today we're going to share in practices that help us tune into our bodies, spirits, and emotions. Last week we laid the groundwork for this and we're going to build on that today. It's also why the written statement is just one step in our racial justice work. We are also going to look at the embodied practices, patterns and policies in congregational life that need healing.

The practices we'll use today are helpful when facing any of the things within us that need to be pruned - all our grasping, fearful, compulsive parts.

We'll share in some silence and take some deep breaths together.

We'll practice relying on God by opening with prayer, and by asking ourselves, "Where is God in this?"

We'll listen and pay attention to how we feel and what we notice within - within our spirits, our bodies, our emotions.

We'll welcome discomfort trusting that we are held in God and that God can use discomfort to prune and form us.

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<sup>2</sup> Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*. (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 36.

If you can't stay for the session today, I invite you to follow these same practices when you read the draft statement later. There will also be questions to help you engage your body, spirit, and emotions as you read.

Our bodies have been so impacted by racism. Yet our bodies, all bodies, are loved and redeemed by God. And God, through Christ Jesus, is present in physical ways to heal us. Jesus came among us to heal with his hands, to walk the way of the cross and to look upon us with love. He gave his hands, feet, and eyes to heal and reconcile us.

By the power of the Spirit, Christ Jesus is still present with us now.  
Christ is present in his body on earth, the church.  
Christ is present in water and the word to give us new life.

Your body is loved and redeemed by God. You can enter racial justice work trusting you are held in God and that God is with you to bring healing.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.