

## **All Bodies Are Good Bodies**

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### **Intro**

I wonder if you noticed that today's readings are all about bodies:

Acts: legs, arms, eyes, eyes, eyes, legs, hand, feet, ankles, legs, legs, arms, hands, eyes, eyes.

Psalm: ears, mouth, mouth, face, heart.

Luke: legs, feet, mouth, heart, hands, feet, flesh, bones, hands, feet, mouth.

Most of us feel a little uncomfortable talking about bodies in church, But both the lame beggar in Acts and the risen Jesus in the Gospel emphasize the importance of bodies.

It is good, especially on Sunday morning, where some of the recent life of the church has over-focused on the spiritual -or acts as if spirituality was somehow separate from bodies

to remember but we have bodies, in some very real way we *are* bodies

Our bodies are created by God, loved by God, our bodies are good

Old bodies, new bodies, creaky bodies, ill bodies, disabled bodies, queer bodies, trans bodies –good, just as they are

### **Beggar**

In Acts, Peter and John encounter a lame man at the temple The man asks them for money and instead Peter takes him by the hand and tells him, in the name of Jesus, to walk.

I want to highlight a few things in this packed passage.

### Seeing

Did you notice when I listed those body parts how many were eyes? Peter stares at the lame man, then tells him to look at them. the man stares back at Peter and John, then the people in the temple stare at Peter and John.

How many of us were taught not to stare at people whose bodies are different from our own, or hissed at a child “don't stare”

How many of us have avoided they eyes of someone who is begging for money in public -whether for themselves or for a charity?

People who pan-handle -who beg in public often say that the most difficult thing about it is the way that people refuse to meet their eyes.

It is impossible to know over the distance of centuries and language but I think there is some mutuality, some equality in this intense looking -and that the man who begs in the temple is fully seen.

The second observation is about money

In the biblical context and in our own people with disabilities are often impoverished, are outside of the exchange of labour for money and forced to be creative to make a living. But in verse 6 Peter says he and John have no silver or gold, this seems like evidence that the apostles adhered to the collective economic practice described in Acts 2:44-45 “they would sell their possessions and goods sharing the proceeds to those in the community who had need.” But it also means that both the lame man and the disciples are outsiders to the economic system.

The third thing and the most complicated is about healing

I am always troubled by healing stories. I know many people with disabilities who say I am fantastic the way that I am -it is society with its assumptions, and lack of ramps, and no close captions- that needs to change.

Rabbi Julia Watts Besler, who uses a wheel chair, says frequently in biblical healing stories the person who is healed is a symbol and not a character with depth, that they don't have voice and their health or disability is equated with distance from God, evil, spiritual lack.

Healing stories also make me uncomfortable because I know people who do want a cure, who have been told either explicitly or more subtly, that their lack of a miraculous change is their fault, they lack faith, that they don't think positively, that they don't eat “clean” foods

As Acts goes on, this “act” of healing gets Peter and John in a whole lot of trouble with the local authorities, a conflict which has been read by Christians in harmful, anti-Jewish ways.

## **Jesus**

Today's gospel passage echoes other resurrection appearances.

Like the appearance to Thomas in John, we witness the need or offer to touch and see Jesus in the place where empire has touched him most violently.

Today's reading occurs immediately after Emmaus, has some of the same characters and follows the same pattern. Jesus: reveals himself, eats, teaches, sends.

Like Jesus' appearance on the shore of Sea of Tiberias in John, Jesus eats fish.

The action words in verses 42-43 "gave, took and ate" are a partial Eucharistic formula and there are many frescoes in the catacombs connecting fish with the celebration of Communion/Eucharist.

Jesus who says, "take eat this is my body" eats not bread but another body, another being, taking his place in the web of energetic, predator/prey relations.

This eating is not just ecological it is also economic. Jesus was part of the complex, highly taxed and regulated Galilean fishing economy and the lives of fishing families and like the beggar and the disciples -Jesus by multiplying fish and loaves, by filling fish nets, lived outside that economy

That Jesus is recognized and known to be fully alive in the act of eating, of feeding his good body, resonates with all those other gospel meals. And this is what the church does, we eat together, we tell stories and when we think love has died, there is love with us again.

### **Disabled God -and Disabled Prophets in the Anthropocene**

Now let's look at the two passages and the two impaired bodies together, in our time of covid and changing climate. A time when different bodies are increasingly vulnerable, when disability often has environmental causes and when people with disabilities have critical knowledge to share with the rest of us.

While the beggar in Acts is healed, Jesus invites, even demands, that his companions see and touch his injured body. Disability theologian Nancy Eiesland said, "In presenting his impaired body to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God." He is adamantly not cured or made whole; his injury is part of him, neither a divine punishment nor an opportunity for a healing object lesson.

Shortly after the healing in Acts Peter describes Jesus as prophet (v. 22) and servant (v 26) that is raised up, echoing verse 7 where the lame man is raised

up. This linguistic echo encourages us to attend to the voices and prophetic work of people with disabilities as well as their Christ-bearing qualities.

Disability activists offers powerful critique and hope in a time of climate crisis. People with disabilities, “vulnerable populations” are and have for years been navigating the kinds of limits that fire polluted air and pandemic are imposing on the rest of us. Disability communities know how to keep on speaking the truth in the face of socially organized denial. People with disabilities know and have rejected the allure of the magic cure –some damage is irreversible, some systems cannot be restored.

Poet and disability activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Sa Marah Sing Ha) describes a dream that, although she probably wouldn’t call it that, sounds an awful lot to me like the kingdom of the disabled God.

“For years awaiting this apocalypse, I have worried that as sick and disabled people, we will be the ones abandoned when our cities flood. But I am dreaming the biggest disabled dream of my life—dreaming not just of a revolutionary movement in which we are not abandoned but of a movement in which we lead the way. With all of our crazy, adaptive-devised, loving kinship and commitment to each other, we will leave no one behind as we roll, limp, stim, sign, and move in a million ways towards cocreating the decolonial living future. I am dreaming like my life depends on it. Because it does.”

Final Blessing: Blessing taken from the words of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Sa Marah Sing Ha)

All bodies are unique and essential,  
all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met.  
The blessing of God All-Loving, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit be upon your  
good body, now and always. Amen