

The Embodied God

John 1:1-18

Good Morning Church Family,

It's so very good to be back together this morning. I've missed being together, filling this space, hearing your voices, sharing our stories. I expect to hear a full report from each of you about how you spent your summer vacation around the potluck tables later on.

One of the biggest parts of my summer was that I did a lot of reading. I've always loved to read, but it's a hobby that's been on the back burner since the kids were born. Getting back into reading has felt so good. I love getting lost in a story, losing track of hours, or the guilty pleasure of ignoring household chores or reasonable bedtimes to read one more chapters. Specifically, I did a lot of reading, and consequently, a lot of thinking about bodies. I got very into memoirs this summer, so people's first person experiences - a few that spoke poignantly about birth, illness and death. All of which are deeply bodily experiences. I also read some non-fiction books about bodies, specifically these two, "The Wisdom of Your Body" and "My Body is Not a Prayer Request."

I've also thought a lot about bodies as I watched people in our church family go through health challenges, pains in their bodies. As I've watched my children's bodies stretched out over the summer, more and of their ankles revealed as they wore their favourite pair

of pants, I've watched as my friend with a toddler and baby wept from exhaustion, every fibre of her body exhausted from sleep deprivation, as we laid to rest Taylor's Uncle, Danny, whose body and way in the world was shaped by a intellectual disability.

In all these readings and experiences, I began to assume the Holy Spirit was speaking to me and I should probably sit up and pay attention. Those were the things from this summer that inspired this sermon series about what it means to have a body, to be a body, and walk this journey of faith in Jesus looks like through that lens, that way of seeing the world.

Embodiment, or Embodied Living, is sort of a popular buzzword right now. Hilary McBride, who wrote this book, is both a Christian and one of the foremost experts and researchers on embodiment and trauma. She says that, "Perhaps the simplest way to describe the experience of embodiment is this: the way that you areEmbodiment is the conscious knowing and living as a body, not as a thing distinct from the self or the mind. It is the how, what, why, where, and who of existence- the ground zero of consciousness, of present moment living. It is to be present to yourself and your experience from the inside out." When I think of embodiment, I think of being aware and valuing my whole self. It's when I realize, "man, I did not sleep well and I'm exhausted." and rather than saying to myself, I'll ignore how tired my body is saying it is and instead guzzle two cups of coffee." I'll try to find a way to seek rest for my body, which may mean a nap.

And from a super young age, we get all kinds of messages from the world, from our families and even from the church about our bodies. I remember realizing as a teenager that the reason we teach young children to fold their hands and close their eyes when they pray is not because it's taught in the bible, but because it helps them to focus, and not be quite so wiggly. I learned as a kid in church that bodies were places of danger, like when Cain killed Abel. As a teenager, I learned that my body was dangerous to men, and it was my job to manage my body with modesty and purity. As an adult in my church, I learned that my body does not belong behind the pulpit. Jokes on them I guess!

This personal experiences sort of boil down to what McBride calls a “untruth” about our bodies, which is, that bodies get in the way of what really matters: theology and intellect. She says, “Theology and intellect aren't superior to the physical aspect of human experience, but we have a history of using them as a way of escape, or bypass, the difficult realities of our bodily existence. By prioritizing theology and intellect over other forms of wisdom, knowing, and spirituality is in many cases a by-product of privilege. Who has the luxury of being able to identify more with thinking than with the bodily existence? Traditionally, it has been men of high status who could spend their time in the academy or seminary, rather than engaging in physical labour or caring for children. Others with less privilege or status could not escape the needs and demands of their bodily existence, especially since social status related to the amount of physical labour a person did. Historically, those with the leade social status have been people of color, women and those with physical disabilities. The paradox here is that the individuals who

had more social power because of their bodies did not experience themselves as defined by their bodies, but they made choices that affected the day-to-day bodily realities of other. An obvious example of this is people with disabilities designing buildings that restrict access for those with disabilities. While thinking, theology, and philosophizing in and of themselves are not bad, we miss out on the full picture of being humans when we use these things to get away from the life lived in bodies.”

In a much more eloquent way, McBride is getting to the underlying message that I absorbed growing up in the church, and maybe some of you can identify with this: that the spirit and the mind were truly the places where God was, and my body was not. My body was something to control, something to ignore, and my soul, my spirit was the place to nurture, to notice God and to commune with God.

With that being the message that I absorbed, I’ve realized that also shaped how I read the Bible. It seemed that scripture didn’t do much talking about bodies, and when it did, it was mostly dire warnings, about how one should chop off their hands or gouge out their eyes if a part of their body caused them to sin. It’s sort of like that adage, “if all you have is a hammer, everything becomes a nail.” If I thought that God was not interested in bodies, if God was found only in my spirit, that’s the message that I would find in scripture.

Is this true? Are our bodies what gets between us and God? Is the life of faith found only in souls, and not in the soles of our feet? (See what I did there?)

In preparing for this sermon series, what I have discovered is that God cares so, so deeply about our bodies and God is present, alive, and active in all sorts of bodies. The Bible speaks of our bodies as places of redemption and love, AND the biggest reason that we can know that is because JESUS BECAME A BODY.

That is the good truth that John is sharing in the opening of his gospel. I'm going to reach our passage again, this time from the New Living Translation: "In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. **So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.** John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'" From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. **He has revealed God to us."**

God became a human. The word that was God and the Light which gave life to everything became a body, in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was fully God and fully human, it's a theological pillar that I feel like I've always known, but I've been struck anew that Jesus became human. Jesus became a BODY, he didn't transcend his body. He did dwell only in his mind or his soul, because like you and me and all of us, he dwelled in a body. Jesus was birthed, nursed, ate food, slept, cried, was smacked by his little brothers, his muscles ached as he worked alongside his father as a carpenter, he went through puberty, his crackling voice probably making his mother chuckle. He got

exhausted and snuck away from the disciples to take naps. He felt overstimulated by the crowds pressing in on him in the hot sun. He suffered and died, in that body.

If Jesus, who is God revealed to us, who is the source of all real love and light in this world, is a body, then we have all kinds of blessings to be fully human, heart, mind, soul, AND Body.

My very favourite quote by author Madeleine L'Engle says, "There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is the deepest message of the incarnation". The incarnation, God becoming a human body. "There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is the deepest message of the incarnation." There is nothing about these tired, hungry, artificial hipped, warm hug, hot tears bodies that cannot have the love of God revealed to them and cannot have the love of God revealed through them.

Further still, there are stories about bodies all throughout the Gospels. Stories of healing and heartbreak. Stories of blood and death. Stories of mental illness and disabilities from birth. Stories that we experienced by real flesh and blood people when they had an encounter with the real, flesh and blood God. Jesus came to the bodies that had been ignored, cast aside to offer real, tangible love and restoration and he called us to offer the same real, tangible love for those cast aside. Love that we offer with our literal hands and feet. What a beautiful calling.

Over the next several weeks, we'll look at stories from the gospels of the healing miracles that Jesus performed and what those miracles tell us about the God who made

the bodies that we dwell inside of. The God who made all of creation, who breathed the breath of life into humankind and then pronounced it “good”.

I’ll offer one last bit of wisdom from Dr. McBride, “Immanence means seeing the world as permeated by the spiritual. Instead of the Divine being far away, the Divine is right here, in this moment, moving between us, through us, and within us as bodies. It has been well argued that the Christian tradition is built on this foundation. The best evidence of this is Jesus-the incarnations of God into the human story. What I have always loved about the story of Christianity, and a large part of why I still follow Jesus despite how much harm has been done in the name of the Christianity, is that it is a story of people who choose to believe that God is not so far away after all. Instead, the Divine is right here among us and shows us through his body that our bodies are not bad, that the Divine exists in this flesh, and that the body is part of God’s way of being in the world. What better way to know that we are not alone than to remind us that the Divine dwells with and moves through all created things? If creation is the expression of the Creator, if all of life is made by and through the Divine, then that includes us too-our flesh and our beating hearts. If God is in all of it, that means there is nowhere we can look where God is not. Everything is sacred. (Not everything is God. It’s different). Everyone, everywhere, is the dwelling place. We are the temple.”

Now dear ones, as we settle in around the potluck table to quell rubbing stomachs, to laugh and offer fellowship to one another, let’s be reminded that God is here with us. Dwelling in this space as he dwells, so lovingly, within our bodies. Thanks be to God!