

"What Is Saving Your Life Right Now? Wearing Skin"
John 1:1-5, 14

Our bodies seem to be under attack right now! Some have even called this time "a war time" with the enemy being the coronavirus. We are more aware of our bodies than ever before. About four weeks ago, I had an allergy cough which started with the beginning of spring. I must have checked my temperature 15 to 20 times in three days. I was watching for all the symptoms of COVID-19. I bet many of you are in the same boat. This has been mostly a negative kind of attention to our bodies. Today we are going to look at our awareness of our bodies as a spiritual practice that has the potential to save our lives. This is what Barbara Brown Taylor names as the practice of "wearing skin."

An important place to start looking at our embodied human experience is in the story of the coming of Jesus as the presence of God into our human experience.

We look today at the words of the Gospel of John in the first chapter about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Sometimes people read these words and think of them in ethereal and otherworldly ways, but the truth of the matter is that this passage is grounded in the daily struggles of our human life in the sweat and blood of our bodily existence. The Gospel of John presents a vision of the purpose of the ministry of Jesus as God's presence in our human experience that brings us renewal and healing. The human experience into which the Word entered is not just a philosophical idea. Jesus came in a specific time and place in our world. He came into a fragile human body. He came during a very difficult time for the people of ancient Israel. They were living under the oppressive power of the Roman Empire. They had a stooge government that was only interested in preserving themselves. Even the Temple became part of the oppressive system of Rome because it was the place where taxes were collected. In verse 14 we have a powerful image of how the Word of God in Jesus came into our experience. In the Greek it literally says that the Word set up his tent among and within us. The Word did not come as a force outside of our experience. The Word did not come as the mighty rulers of the world come. The Word came through the power of God's creation and the power of human relationships. I am mindful of the suffering of so many in our world today. This past week there was a story on NPR about the thousands of Venezuelan migrant workers in Columbia who are trying to go back home because they have become homeless after losing their meager incomes due to the coronavirus. They moved to Columbia in the last few years to try to escape the devastating economic crisis. One story that struck me was that of a woman by the name of Garcia and her family. She, her husband, and two children have to walk about 450 miles to get back home. She is pushing her two-year old child in a stroller while the 8 year-old is helping the father with pushing their belongings on a handmade cart with a broken wheel. I imagined Jesus riding in the stroller. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us in our pain and suffering.

The coming of Jesus as God's love in the flesh is about God entering and healing our brokenness. In verse 1 where it says, "In the beginning," we have a strong reference to the story of creation in Genesis. This is the same beginning. In this passage, we are invited to remember the power of God's creative energy of creation and to know that God is not separate from this creation. In fact, in the Word we know that God sets up a tent among and within us. What John was telling his community, and eventually us, is that wherever there is suffering and pain, God is right there. God is present through the healing power of solidarity and friendship setting up camp in the middle of our most horrific experiences. The Word came into the world to bring light and love by setting up camp in our midst. The creative energy of God dwells among us through the power of speaking and listening, and through the power of being physically here on earth.

In the stories of creation in the book of Genesis God affirms the goodness of creation and of our human bodies. In the Gospel of John, we see the coming of Jesus as an affirmation of the physical experience of our being.

Part of the challenge of being in this human experience is the combination of the vulnerability and grace of our bodies. They are both amazingly fragile and resilient at the same time. They help do great things like works of art, building, thinking, farming, teaching, writing, caring, and much more. At the same time, they are frail and do not last forever. The fragility of our flesh reminds us of our need for others, for the earth, and for God. Our bodies teach us one of the most important lessons in life: Love is what keeps us alive. It is amazing to see God as being part of this experience of human frailty in the person of Jesus coming to the world as a human baby with physical needs and experiences and ultimately dying in agony and pain. This physical body became the vehicle of so much love and of transforming hearts and minds. His hands washed the disciples' feet, brought energy of healing to many, and gave food to the hungry around him. His mouth brought words of incredible wisdom and challenge to the world. His feet travelled dusty roads to reach forgotten towns and to share the good news of God's love. His ears listened to the cries of the suffering and oppressed. His eyes looked with compassion on those he encountered affirming the uniqueness and glory of each person, including those who hated him. He shed tears in sympathy for those who were in pain. His physical hunger and thirst brought him to many tables and wells where he satisfied the hunger and thirst of so many souls. His body being crucified became a symbol of God's vulnerability and love.

And so today we affirm this physical experience of our lives. Being here on earth, as difficult and challenging as it may be, is also essential for our salvation. Having this physical experience with all its limitations helps us to learn to be present to God's love in ways that are not possible in any other form. It teaches us one of the most difficult spiritual lessons of faith: the only way up is down. Only when we learn to surrender and flow with love, are we able to be completely free. Vulnerability is the only way to true love.

Take time to reflect this week on the wisdom you are gaining about love and life during this hardship of the coronavirus. What are the spiritual lessons you are learning from your body and the body of the whole world?

We will end with a body blessing by Joyce Rupp adapted to our time.

Touch your forehead: May your ability to think help you to do your part during this pandemic. May the Gospel teachings about non-judgment resound in your thoughts of others.

Touch your ears: May you hear the healing sounds of nature and the positive news of love. May you listen closely to how God invites you to grow spiritually during this difficult time.

Touch your eyes: May you slow down and look more intently in order to find God's movement in your life.

Touch your shoulders: May you carry your cross of difficulties with courage, trusting God's strength to uphold you.

Hold your Hands together: May your service be so intertwined with God that God's love overflows from your heart.

Place your hands over your heart: May you keep turning your heart toward God and all this love to be reflected in the way you live your life.

Feet: May you welcome God's companionship and guidance as you travel the path of life.

Return with all your heart. Remember you are the temple of the Holy Spirit: body, mind, and soul. Be at peace! Amen.