



## **"BODY WORK"**

**SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 12: 12-31a; LUKE 4: 14-21  
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

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The Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, Pastor

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**

12:12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

12:13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

12:14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

12:15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

12:16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

12:18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

12:19 If all were a single member, where would the body be?

12:20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

12:22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

12:23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;

12:24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,

12:25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

12:26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

12:27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

12:28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?

12:30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

12:31 But strive for the greater gifts.

### **Luke 4:14-21**

4:14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

4:15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

4:16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,

4:17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,

4:19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

4:20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

4:21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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Today we've got to cross a threshold. We've got to make a transition.

We are being called to come all the way from the realities of our lives, from the realities of life on this planet—all the way from the pain, all the way from the loneliness, all the way from the confusion, all the way from the harshness, all the way from the busy-ness, all the way from the distractions and sensory overloads—all the way from the fatigue and the stress, from the headlines and Facebook posts—all the way from diapers and bills to pay and lists of things we need to do—all the way from all the details of our lives to that Table.

And the thing is, we aren't supposed to leave all that behind—we're not supposed to act like we are something that we're not. We're called to haul all that stuff here with us—to come with what burdens us, to come with what confounds us, to come with what is true about us.

We're supposed to come as we really are—to this Table. We don't leave our lives behind, we come with them fully laid bare.

And we come together—this Table is not our own private dining room, it is not a Table for one, it is a crowded Table, a Table where we're truly known and attended to, and so is everyone is—there is no scarcity here, there is no isolation here.

And we come with intention—this meal is not to be rushed, but to be savored, this is not a meal eaten hurriedly in the car on the way to practice, it is a meal that we prioritize, that we take the time we need to chew and digest and feel the gift of being filled and nourished and provided for.

All the transitions, the thresholds we cross to get to the Table, to get to taste and see God's radical, revolutionary love are formidable—and there can be rough terrain along the way.

The thing is, once you cross over, once you swallow the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation, once you do that in beloved community, you can't go back and live like what happens here isn't true. The transition we make changes us, and the way we live in this world.

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Paul's words to the Corinthian church sound almost ridiculously obvious—of course our whole body can't be a nose. Of course the hand can't tell the foot, I have no need of you.

But the repetition and rudimentary nature of this section of his letter to this community is only curious when you forget who he is talking to. The Corinthian community had some serious growth edges. And most of them circled around the way they treated each other, more specifically, they had a problem with how they treated the most vulnerable in their midst.

This was a culture with extreme economic disparity. This was community of intense cultural diversity. This was a faith family of distorted theological understanding. This was a body divided against itself—mostly because some fancied themselves as more important, and others were doubting their own worth.

How can something so long ago, in such a far away land and culture—sound so utterly familiar and close to home?

This moment in time in our country, in our community, in our context—calls us from the same distortions, from the same delusions of worthiness and unworthiness, from the same lies of scarcity, from the same annihilating kinds of oppression and exclusion and abuses of power.

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If it's all so obvious, if it's all so clear—this way that our bodies thrive, this way that we are called to live, then why don't we live that way?

Why is it so easy for our bodies to get out of balance, for our relationships to be so trivialized, for our communities to be so fractured?

Maybe Paul's words and Luke words, as basic as they sound, are the hardest thing for us to actually believe, much less to embody.

Our work as Jesus followers is Body Work—the kind of work that creates wellness in the whole system, for every single part of the body. The kind of Body Work that honors the most vulnerable, the most tender to the touch, the most raw parts of who we are.

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You see you can't just go through the motions to get here—the whole system feels that, the whole system suffers from that kind of holding back. The Body only flourishes when the nourishment can get to all the body parts—when there aren't things blocking our connections.

What would it take for you to let down your defenses? What would it take for you to trust this Table enough to truly cross over into the way of life it promises?

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Back in the day, back all those centuries, across all those cultures and ways of seeing the world—Jesus made a reputation for himself—and it was not something a lot of people found palatable.

Jesus staked his whole life on the urgent need to free the oppressed, to liberate the captives, to heal the afflicted. He didn't make any bones about it—he was good news for the poor in the flesh. He didn't sugar coat what he is telling us to ingest.

This Table is about liberation from oppression—that means the comfortable arrive here confronted with the impact of our comfort on those who are languishing. The hard reality mirrored back to us is where our freedom lies.

The amazing thing is that this Table is not about guilt. It is about grace.

And the challenge is that this Table is not about feigning ignorance, this Table is not about tolerance; this Table is about truth.

The truth that this Table feeds us sets us free from whatever it is that blinds us to the difference between this Table and the lives we lead.

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“It is dangerous to be uncomfortable in your own skin. The sharp edges of self loathing and debilitating isolation can cut deeply when we are strangers to ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

I remember the freedom I felt when I wrote those words over ten years ago. They are the first two sentences of my book, LTBD. I had found my voice in the faith that formed me, in the faith that both gave me my strength and hindered by healing. I had crossed over from trying to hide from the hard truths of my life, from trying to hide the hard truths of my life from the world into a place where I was willing to risk telling the truth.

And part of the truth I had to tell took me interrogating the lies I had learned in the name of faith.

The truth was that my body had languished from the hiding places I inhabited, and I had retreated there because of things I had learned from the church. The transition from secret shame to truly embracing God's promises was hard work, Body Work, and I didn't get there by myself.

Once I opened myself up to the possibility that the truth could set me free, that the trauma I lived with in my body was something Jesus' healing touch could reach, once I crossed that threshold of trust, I had to write about it, I had to preach about it, I had to let that love flow freely from me.

Jesus doesn't feed us here for us to play it safe or to keep the truth under wraps. He feeds us here to empower us to share this Good News.

Jesus is a healer—whatever it is that ails you—he calls us to join him at the margins of society—where the pain is most acute.

And we don't come to those margins to fix people; we come to those margins to let Jesus tend our wounds as well. The margins are where we truly meet Jesus—and when we truly meet ourselves. Because when we get there—when we make that transition, when we cross that threshold and find our seat at the welcome Table, we realize we've come home to the Body we've been a part of all along—and that our willingness to trust, to feast on the promise that my redemption is tangled up with yours, and yours, and yours, and ours, we can finally take a deep breath and feel the beauty of our place in the family of things.

When you're ready to tell the truth, when you're ready to see the truth, when you're ready to live the truth like your life depends on it, that truth will set you free.

And in that shared freedom, in that love feast, we feel the vitality and the peace and the joy of a Body made well.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mount Shoop, Marcia W. *Let the Bones Dance: Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (WJKP, 2010), 2.