Liturgy that Matters

- February 20, 2022 -

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

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spiritual nourishment for collective liberation

TEXTS

February 20, 2022

Genesis 45:3-11, 15
Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50
Luke 6:27-38

What links the texts this week?

Food provision, land inheritance, seed and produce, warm clothing, reciprocity - The language of capital and resource is woven through this week's texts in ways that are bound to resonate with a dispossessed people. In three of the four passages, the resources spoken of were physical, *material*. We are thus instructed in spiritual practice not centered on the abstract, bound only to theological conception. Love, instead, is necessarily incarnate, enfleshed in our physical world even via the management of our material resources.

ORDER OF WORSHIP (click here for a text version of the liturgy)

Call to worship

Wherever you are, bring your blessed body to worship --
Your body that moves through time and space,
that allows you to embrace another.

If you feel strong or strange in your body, come.
If you feel complex or content in your body, come.

All flesh bears witness to the Divine.
Let us welcome theSpirit, living and breathing in our very being.

Opening Prayer

God With Us, we honor what our bodies have made it through to be here today -- the pain and joy that circulates in our systems and lives in our cells. Though we often silence the testimonies of our flesh, you, Incarnate One, ask us to pay attention. May we learn to listen to our bodies, to honor their vulnerability, to love our flesh and build systems of bodily autonomy and care. We remember, our bodies are your body.

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Teach us to treat them as such. Amen.

Invitation to Offering

Let us gather our resources to bolster networks of compassion so the sacred worth of all people might be honored through care. For we honor the living and the dead by sustaining systems of life.

Prayer of Dedication

We dedicate this offering to the freedom and flourishing of bodies everywhere. We long for prison systems to crumble and for healthcare to be accessible. We long for air that is fresh and water that is clean. We long for nourishing food and spaces where all are safe to live and play. Meet us in our longing, oh God, that we may help to make it so. Amen.

Benediction

Celestial bodies called sun, moon, planet, star.
Bodies of water called ocean, lake, sound, pond.
The body of Christ called bread, teacher, community, Love.
The body that goes by your name
and carries your history,
all of it part of the Unfolding Whole.
Let us go forth, co-create the image of God.

SERMON PREP

Questions:

- In what ways do you engage your spirituality with your physical body? How does your spirituality impact the physical bodies of others? What could you do to make this impact even more healing?
- Whose legacy and spirit would you like to resurrect in this lifetime? How do you plan to sow the seeds of their life into your own?
- What are the sources of pressure in your life to appear to the world as a "finished product"? How can you help alleviate similar pressure for those in your community?

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Application

This week's sermon commentaries are written by Damon Garcia (he/him).

Cosmic - Much of religious talk often falls prey to a dualistic view of humans, discussing the state and conditions of your soul within the context of the material conditions of your everyday life. This pervasive dualism splits you into two: your spirit and your body. But we don't experience life this way. There isn't a "spiritual self" deep inside you that is processing life differently than your "physical self". It's just you in there.

Breaking free from this dualistic view is still difficult. If you've ever had a conversation about your "spiritual life" or your "spiritual journey", as if they were distinct from your everyday life and your everyday journey, then you know this dualism well.

In our Scripture reading, Paul witnesses this dualistic discourse about the spiritual and the physical in his own time and brings a new interpretation.

Long before Paul preached about Christ as the second Adam, Jewish interpreters of Genesis had philosophical conversations about two Adams. These two Adams, however, were revealed in the two creation stories in Genesis. The first Adam was from Genesis 1: "God created humankind in his image (Genesis 1:27)", and the second Adam was from Genesis 2: "God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7)."

Including both creation stories in the Biblical narrative resulted in diverse philosophical discussions among Jewish teachers about how to approach this contradiction. Some spoke of different sets of humans created at different times while others interpreted it more symbolically. This interpretive discourse about the human in Genesis 1 and the human in Genesis 2 evolved over time, and eventually, the discourse was reshaped by Greek metaphysics that pervaded as a result of Greco-Roman hegemony. A new reading emerged that spoke of the two Adams as two parts of the human individual.

A contemporary of Paul was Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who explicated this reading of the time, saying "there is a vast difference between the human being who has been molded now and the one who previously came into being after the image of God." In this interpretation of Genesis' two Adams, the first Adam is a *spiritual* Adam, who Philo described as "a kind of idea… incorporeal… immortal by nature." This was heavily influenced by Greek metaphysics that interpreted the body as a container for the spirit and interpreted the spirit as a separate ideal self that existed before entering the body. According to this theory, the first Adam in Genesis 1 was the ideal spirit that entered into the physical Adam in Genesis 2, which always fails to live up to the original ideal spirit.[1]

Paul takes this popular interpretation of a distinct spiritual Adam and reverses the order saying, "it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual." For Paul the physical Adam in Genesis 2, made from dust, is the first Adam. The spiritual Adam, however, isn't something we lost in our past, but is something that is emerging from our future. Paul's first Adam is us, as physical human beings, and the second Adam is *Christ*: "a life-giving spirit". Paul's contribution to this dualistic discourse about our spiritual self and physical self is to claim that we are *wholly* physical, but we are *becoming* spiritual.

The spiritual is not something outside ourselves, or before ourselves. The spiritual is something that we are

1 Mayra Rivera, Poetics of the Flesh (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 31-32.

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all collectively becoming in our physical everyday lives. The Cuban American theologian, Justo González, makes this distinction clear, saying "when the Bible contrasts the spiritual with its opposite, that other pole is not the 'material' but the 'old'."[2] Paul ultimately retains the Greek metaphysical dualism of his time in his discussion of spiritual and physical bodies, but placing the spiritual *after* the physical provides us a way out of the dualistic view that splits you into part spiritual and part physical.

So how, then, can we discuss our spiritual life based on this new understanding? González asserts that "being 'spiritual' means living out of the future we have been promised." A spiritual life, therefore, is a "life lived out of expectation, out of a hope and a goal. And that goal is the coming Reign [sic] of God."[3]

Working toward the ideal world of God's Kin-dom, where we are free from oppression and exploitation, is what a spiritual life looks like. In every moment we are physical bodies becoming spiritual bodies because every human follows the way of the "life-giving spirit" as we move toward the ideal future of community with God.

Structural - Based on this understanding of the spiritual life as a "life lived out of expectation" Justo González calls the church to live out of *mañana*. *Mañana* is Spanish for tomorrow, but it's also used humorously to refer to any specified time in the future that isn't now. To live out of mañana is not a life of procrastination, however, but a life of hope and expectation for the world that tomorrow holds.

We hope for and expect liberation from all oppression in God's eternal freedom. This hope is not a fickle emotion that soothes our hearts for a moment. This hope drives us to radically challenge the systems of oppression in our midst. Living in expectation for a liberated world tomorrow requires us to radically question the unjust social order of *today.*

When Paul distinguishes between those who are of dust and those who are of heaven we should remember that Paul set the order right for us. The spiritual comes after the physical. So a person of heaven is not a person of another *place.* It is a person of another *time*. A person of heaven is a person of the world to *come.*

It's easier to imagine what "those who are of heaven" look like when we imagine them as people who live according to the world to come. We can all imagine people like this because we know people who live according to the values of the world *as it ought to be*. All those people are people of heaven, because they're of another time. And as we aspire to live the same kinds of lives we become people of heaven too.

Think of the people throughout history who fought for the kind of change that they could never experience during their lifetime. They spent their lives living out of this hope for the world to come. And as the world changes, their life continues all around us, growing into a different kind of life beyond the physical. Honoring their legacy and fighting for the same kind of change they fought for is a different kind of resurrection. When we carry on the struggle for those who couldn't experience the liberation they struggled for, we are sowing the seeds of their lives into our own.

In their lifetime their seed was "perishable". In our lifetimes it becomes "imperishable". What was "sown in dishonor" in their lifetime is "raised in glory" in our own. What was "sown in weakness" becomes "raised in power." Their physical body rises again as a spiritual body when we continue the struggle for the world to

2 Justo Gonzalez, Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 158.

3 Gonzalez, 168.

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come.

Peruvian theologian and founder of Latin American Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, reminds us that "the resurrection of Christ is not an isolated occurrence, but has as its consequence the resurrection of every other human being. . . Because it overcomes the bounds set by death, the resurrection of Christ is a message of life that carries the stamp of universality."[4] Writing from the economically exploited lands of Latin America, this stamp of universality weighs even heavier. The most exploited peoples of the world have a unique understanding of the need for humanity to become something new.

Following Christ does not look like joining the singular group that resurrects. Following Christ is a unique call to be witnesses to the universal resurrection of *all* humanity. To assert the resurrection is, as Gutiérrez says, "to assert life in the face of death."[5]

Personal - Your spirit isn't a better part of you, or a former part of you that was placed in your body. As Paul reminds us, "It is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual." Your spirit isn't something you once were. Spirit is something you are actively becoming.

As in Paul's seed analogy, a seed does not become another kind of seed, but it transforms into something *new*. Paul insults his readers for asking what kind of bodies we will have when we are raised because that question is just as silly as seeds asking what shape of seed they will grow into. A seed cannot fathom the kind of plant it will grow into, and with the same limitations, we cannot fathom what our resurrected life will look like.

"But God gives it a body as he has chosen," Paul says, "and to each kind of seed its own body." Just as each plant grows to be its own kind, you are growing into your own kind. You learn, you grow, and you actively transform day after day for your entire life. This journey of lifelong transformation is exciting, stressful, beautiful, heartbreaking, and more. This is how it feels for each of us. We're all feeling it together. But on this journey of transformation, you must remember that the person you are becoming is an entirely new person that has never existed before.

Can you imagine the relief that would overwhelm your life if you actually believed that? No wonder your transformation has always felt so difficult - No human has ever lived your life in the exact way that you are living it! What you are becoming is entirely unique, and you cannot fathom what you will become, like a seed can't fathom what it will look like as it grows.

Let your shoulders down. You do not need to pose as the person you wish you were, because who you are becoming is even better. Embrace the unique life that you are blessed with and grow with wide-eyed wonder at what you become.

Imagine what a community would look like if every individual embraced their unique lives in this way. How would that reshape the ways we spoke with each other and lived with each other and helped each other? Imagine all the relational stresses that could be alleviated.

Also, imagine a community that could help you embrace your own unique life on days when you're overwhelmed with shame, insecurities, and mistreatment. What would that look like? And what would it look like for you to offer that to others? How could we be attentive to the needs of those whose lives are

4 Gustavo Gutierrez, The God of Life (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 110.

5 Gutiérrez, 14.

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uniquely difficult?

Brazilian Theologian, Rubem Alves wrote a poem called *Celebrations of the Resurrection*, and he ends the poem with a line that is empowering for a community that chooses to live this way. He writes, "Resurrected bodies are more beautiful warriors because they bring in their hands the colors of the rainbow. And so the bodies are transformed into seed which impregnates the earth so the future can be born."[6]

As a community that is blessed to receive life and experience it in 2022, we are called to sow our seeds into this world by living out the unique lives we have been blessed with. As we live in this way, what is sown as perishable will be raised as imperishable. What is sown in dishonor will be raised in glory. What is sown in weakness, will be raised in power. What is sown through our physical body, will be raised as a spiritual body. This is the spiritual life.

Words for inspiration:

Listen to Steal Away Arr. and Conducted by Dr. Roland M. Carter as a still-triumphant reminder of our human ephemerality, especially in at the hands of cruel dominating forces. It's believed that this sacred tune carried a double meaning for slaves who were bound for escape from plantations.

6 Rubem Alves, I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1986), 9.

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