

There's nothing quite like...*being sick*...to awaken us to the reality...of *our own bodies*. Not that we go around actually *thinking* that our bodies *aren't* real. But that we easily go around *ignoring* our bodies...as if they are an equivalence of clothing...or cars--just something *extraneous* to us, but *useful*.

Sickness awakens us to just how much our *selves* inseparably include our *bodies*. And when our bodies are not well then it affects our whole sense of self...and our ability to function in the world. And when our bodies *are* well then it is easy to overlook just how much a gift that actually is.

When we are sick--as I was over Christmas and as I'm still recovering in terms of my energy and my voice—when we are sick, we have to adjust our expectations of what we can *do*, and how effectively we can *think*, and it can throw off our *feelings* about life. When our bodies are unwell then it is not possible to be unaffected in our whole self.

And so, when it comes to religion, it is very easy to overlook that *our bodies are spiritually important*—and not just our *minds* and *hearts*. My early exposure to the Episcopal Church was accompanied by the surprise of just how much our bodies are asked to *do* things in worship—stand, sit, stand, sit, kneel, cross yourself, bow, genuflect, walk, eat, drink, walk, sit, kneel, stand, etc... Of course, not all Episcopalians do *all* those things in worship but the Episcopal worship I spent my formative years in *did ask my body to do all those things*. And so I still do them. Because there, is in our way of worshipping, much more of a sense that *our bodies also want to pray*—and not just our minds and hearts. Once you have experienced this way of worshipping, when you attend a different kind of service that just focuses on what you *think* and *feel* and gives your body nothing to do then your body can actually say to you: “What a minute, you mean I don't get to participate?” And that kind of worship can strangely feel somewhat flat—even if it was the kind of worship that you grew up in before you became an Episcopalian. My body does not like going to services like that now and it lets me know.

But this is not only a *practical* matter of our bodies in worship, it is also a profoundly important matter of *the importance of our bodies to God*. Our bodies are not irrelevant to God. Our bodies are part of how God has made us a whole being. Even the angels have bodies—just not physical ones as we understand it. And in our resurrection after death, the New Testament emphasizes that our *physical bodies* will be transformed by God into *spiritual bodies*. And so, even as our physical bodies are subject to sickness, sin, and death in this life, they will also be subject to *redeeming by God in the life to come*. And so, our bodies really do matter—there is a *continuity* between our bodies now and our bodies to come, even though there will also be a great *change* awaiting us.

And so, it matters what we do with our bodies in this life. The fragility of our bodies now is in part how we may learn to have compassion upon the fragility of others now—and such compassion, Jesus said, is the defining criteria of judgment in the life to come. The glory of our bodies even now is in part how we may learn to recognize the joy of God for us. And as our bodies are damaged through sickness, sin, and death, then we may learn how much our bodies eagerly long for their spiritual transformation by God.

And so, this is why the apostle Paul was so compelled to address an abuse of bodies in his church in Corinth. I have to say, in my three decades of service in eight churches, I *have* experienced some difficult and traumatic times with church members, but I have *never* served a church where *prostitution* was an issue! And what is striking about Paul's response to it is that he doesn't moralize about it, or talk about sex as if it were something disgusting in itself, but instead, he reminds these men to remember the *spiritual importance of their bodies*: “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God...glorify God in your body.”

Our bodies, even as they are compromised by this fallen world, are beloved of God. And what God loves, we may also respect in ourselves. And what God loves, we may respect in others. Our bodies are both fragile and joyful. Our bodies want to pray. And because they belong to God—they share our destiny in the glory of God.