

Ben Lattimer
Sunday Service, Sermon
January 21, 2024
On Genesis 2
Embodied

Sermon

Intro / Hook: Cannibals?

Cannibals. That's what they used to call us. Us Christians, I mean. The early church was accused of cannibalism. And I can see it, honestly. The central ritual for the early Christians was cannibalism - in a sense. Communion - the bread and the cup, the body of Christ broken for us... Outsiders used to hear of these strange tales and wondered in horror.

Even in the Gospel of John, Jesus' hearers are confused (and horrified): saying, "How can this man give us his body to eat?" And while we may not actually be cannibals, there is this idea that in communion we are receiving the body of Christ - taking it in, being transformed by it even...

Series Intro / connection (Deuteronomy)

[*Singing...*] "Shema, Yisrael, adonai elohenu..."

Twice a day, faithful Jews pray this prayer, as Cindy said. "Hear, Israel - the LORD is our God..."

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength..."

This, Jesus pronounced, is the first and greatest commandment.

This sparked in us an idea for this new sermon series - reflecting on what it means to love God with our heart, soul, and strength, with all our being - Body, Mind, and Spirit.

We begin this week at the end - "with all our strength," loving God with these physical bodies of ours... Which isn't something we often think about.

The ancient Greeks had this idea at least as far back as Plato - of the body as a prison for our true selves - our immortal souls. There was this idea, that the material world was less real - and more corrupt. Our physical bodies were something to be overcome, not embraced.

This idea engrained itself so deeply in Western thought - embedded itself even in the Church in the centuries after Jesus...

But this Greek ideal was and is at odds with the Hebrew vision we find in Genesis and beyond.

Creation Stories

Here in these creation stories, the Hebrews have a God who creates the physical world - and calls it GOOD. And then in chapter two, we get this beautiful image of God, tenderly shaping the human out of the earth - carefully forming it, and then breathing *life* into its body...

For the Hebrews we are *embodied* beings - only fully alive in these bodies that are a gift. In the Old Testament, the spirit apart from the body is little more than a shade, a non-existence...

Even in the New Testament, the vision for life eternal is *RESURRECTION*. Not disembodied spirits set free - but our bodies made whole - the world made new.

We are embodied creatures - to the very end and beyond...

Trusting the Wisdom of Our Bodies...

What does our faith look like, when we embrace this connection to our physical selves - to the earth from which we were formed...?

Some of the old monks of the middle ages beat themselves, seeing their bodies as something to be overcome. But when we stop othering our physical selves - maybe that opens the doorway to healing. Our bodies aren't perfect. Tom joked yesterday at the Men's Breakfast about our "organ recitals" as we age - each of us reciting which organs aren't working quite right.

None of us live into Madison Avenue's vision of what a perfect body should be like. But what if we just owned it - embraced the bodies we have as a gift? Our own bodies, with the breath of God breathed into them...

There's wisdom in the body. I remember my mentor Bill always inviting me to slow down - to "reconnect my thinking self and my feeling self." Our bodies can be incredibly attuned to the people around us - understanding the feelings in the room, if we only take the time to listen. Listening to our bodies can teach us about ourselves too.

An embodied faith is much more active and physical. The good news of Jesus is not just words - it's real and physical and tangible. An embodied faith is the fellas from the Men's Breakfast who went out to visit one of our own at the nursing home, who hasn't been able to get around for years now... It's the place to stay in the cold, that our deacons provided a homeless person with this week. The spare coat and snacks that a deacon gave her when they picked her up at the hospital.

There's kind of a relief in this. It's tangible, something we can hold onto - this kind of loving God, with all our strength, with all our bodies...

Communion Connection (Cannibals Reprise)

So, we aren't really cannibals. You've probably figured that out. But you know, there's a sense that we really are eating Jesus - cannibals as it were. Andy Murray reflected once in our Bible study that all the stuff from which we were made - the atoms from which we were formed - all came from stars now long since gone. We are stardust, as Jan Richardson says, all the earth. And to the earth our bodies will return someday. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust... We come from the stuff of stars - and will be part of what comes after.

But those atoms, the physical pieces of us remain... Part of us remains - part of this good earth, and the cycle of life. We breathe perhaps the very same air that Jesus breathed, and take in that which Jesus touched.

And Christ's real, human body - perfect and flawed was broken for us...
So we take the bread and the cup, in remembrance of him...

Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese"

Cindy's poet laureate, Mary Oliver, writes:

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

...

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Amen.