

Meeting God in Our Bodies

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Texts: Luke 1: 39-45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ^{and} exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

A few years ago, my wife (fiancé at the time) and I took a day trip here to Somerville/Cambridge (aka Camberville) in a search for an apartment. It was at some point in March and we knew we would be moving here in June. We were in the midst of planning a wedding, I was finishing up school and wrapping up a job and Jackie was finishing up medical school. There was a lot happening. Time was of the essence. We had just this one day to find an apartment.

We met with a broker and started our search. As we visited each apartment, no matter the size, layout, amenities, commute... I would close my eyes and assess what kind of feeling I was getting in my body... and I would either get "a good" vibe or "a weird" vibe. You see, that is how I judge apartments. It is mostly based on feeling. -Jackie learned that about me for the first time that day.

So, when we came across apartments that were technically "good fits" she would turn to me and ask me what I thought... I would respond honestly... ehhhh... I am just not getting a good vibe... she was like what does that even mean? Place has everything we need, it is in our price range...

You can probably imagine the frustration and the stress boiling at this point after looking at several apartments with little time left in the day... But I held strong to my: I am just not getting a good vibe feeling. Jackie looked at me with... what....seriously...

And so, we had just one more apartment left to look at. Luckily for both of us when we walked into that last apartment, which is the apartment we live in now... I got that good vibe I was looking for. This is where we are meant to LIVE. It just feels right.

I honestly believe there is an inherent wisdom that lives in our bodies. Wisdom that God has given us. Wisdom that draws us to look deeper...look closer...

Sometimes that wisdom is discomfort in social justice work, pushing us to look honestly within ourselves and address what is at the heart of the uneasiness ...maybe the discomfort in talking about race is rooted in white guilt or fragility, or discomfort in talking about gender is engrained sexism or transphobia, or discomfort in talking about sexuality is internalized homophobia...

And sometimes it is wisdom in our bodies telling us to take a break. To rest. To practice Sabbath. To stray from perfectionism or these looming pressures to do more, be better...

And sometimes it is wisdom in our bodies telling us something that we do not intellectually know yet... something maybe we do not have words for...but that is still very much present within us.

We witness Elizabeth today leaning into this kind of bodily wisdom... no one told her about Mary's new pregnancy. Luke's account of the visitation leaves us to believe that right after Mary received the news from Gabriel, she hurriedly left to see Elizabeth...we read, she "went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth" We learned earlier in Luke, that Elizabeth is also pregnant. She bears a prophet, a son who she will name John.

Since this visitation passage is then immediately following Angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, I think it is safe to assume that Mary must have been early on in her pregnancy and perhaps not even showing... and before they even exchange words, Elizabeth feels in her own body... she feels the child in her own womb leap with joy as she approaches Mary. The wisdom in Elizabeth's body speaks to her, and she knows... she sees Mary... and in that very moment and says, "Blessed are you among women".

Before I continue, I must admit talking about Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancies is not an easy one. As I recount this story, there is this unsettling feeling in my body, pushing me to pause...as I think about loved ones, friends, everyone I know and do not know who have faced different experiences with pregnancy...

experiences of miscarriages, of still births, of abortions, of sperm and egg donations, of surrogates, of invitro fertilization, of adoption...of all the ways a deep desire for a child, or more children did not come to be ... all the many experiences of joy, invisible pain, trauma, shame, relief, isolation...

Elizabeth saw Mary, really saw her (and maybe all the feelings she was carrying with her in which I can only imagine as wonder, uncertainty, maybe even little fear?), let us likewise hold all those we know and do not know, perhaps even ourselves, who faced these experiences and possibly so much more... hold all of this in our hearts now. Remembering God is there with us. In the heartbreak, in the decisions, in the loss, in the joy. All of it.

Because when we think about it...God intentionally is with those who live at the margins in our passage today. Literally, even in the physical location of Mary and Elizabeth. They unite in small Judean village that is not even named in the passage. We just know it is a small village in mountainous terrain. It is not named as an important or well-known city, like Jerusalem.

We see God, today, present in the unseen. In the often ignored, overlooked. In the young. In the old. In the unmarried. In the married. Many biblical scholars agree that God chose two women who had no social or economic standing ...and little, if any social power.

But nonetheless God chooses them: two women. Two Jewish women from Palestine. Two women of color. Who would otherwise be cast aside. Disregarded.

But God enters our world through them. God enters into the world from the outskirts, from the margins. As I wrote and pondered what this could mean, I came across a theologian, Meghan Larissa Good. I cannot paraphrase what she says, it deserves to be full quoted. So, I quote: God's kingdom isn't coming from the center out; it's coming from the margins in... God is favoring those the world has not favored. God is choosing those the world has not chosen. God is remembering those the world has forgotten. Those who through most of history have glutted themselves on power, on riches, on violence, and most of all on their exclusive possession of God are officially losing their license. God will speak through

those who have been silenced. God will work through those who have been dismissed. God will dwell in those who have been shut out of the official systems.” -end quote.

God will speak through, God will work through and God will dwell in those who have been silenced, dismissed and shut out of official systems. Dwelling in our bodies... trans and cis bodies, nonbinary bodies, intersex bodies... in this flesh through which we move around the world... is sacred and full of wisdom. ...This flesh, which I know that I often take for granted. God comes to the world as human and as divine...who will walk the earth like us...who will experience hunger, joy, fear, laughter... for me, that reminds me that our humanity, our very bodies are so intertwined with divinity. The humanity and divinity that lives within us is almost inseparable.

Because of that I believe we are gifted with an inherent spiritual intimacy with God. A closeness that gives us life and pushes us to be ever more present in this moment. Feeling the wind brush across our face, the taste of snowfall on our tongues, the sound of a crackling fireplace.

In our passage today, Elizabeth listens to God in the depths of her own womb, revealing the unseen, the hidden within Mary. She sees Mary, witnesses her transformation and almost instantly recognizes her as the mother of the Lord: “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”

This child that leaps in Elizabeth’s womb is, John. In his lifetime, John preaches and baptizes crowds of people. Baptizes - One of the most bodily blessings we can receive that encompasses humanity and divinity. The touch of another person creating the sign of the cross on our forehead with water and the Holy Spirit. A sacrament which is performed within community, within the body of Christ, who vows to love, support and care to the one baptized.

The child Elizabeth sees in Mary is Jesus, the Messiah. In his time on earth, as we will witness together later in our liturgical year, Jesus practicing healing ministry with his very body, with his very touch. We will see over and over again that Jesus never hesitated to touch those who were sick, who were poor, who were seen as less than because of different physical abilities, he touched all those who were out casted. Jesus talked and shared a drink of water with a Samaritan woman (a big -eeee), ate meals with tax collectors and sinners. His very ministry, like his birth lives at the margins, working its way in, touching all of us.

Jesus gets up from a meal and then washes his disciples’ feet, drying them with his own towel that is wrapped around him. You know, I do not want to stray us too far from this sermon and what I want to talk about...

but my eyes, perhaps it is my queer eyes, have a hard time glancing over that visual without thinking about physical intimacy. But before I digress too much, I want to say this image is powerful. The Messiah, with his body, directly caring for another body. He is not afraid to touch and clean his disciples’ feet. Feet that probably are not only dirty, but sore, blistered, bruised from so much walking and with little protection. Their bodies, their feet, too, are sacred.

Dr. David Jeremiah says, the gospels uses the words, “hands,” fingers,” and touch” nearly two hundred times and the words often refer to Jesus. Jesus’s touch gives insight in how our very bodies can be a mechanism for healing, for comfort. Even more, the fact that he touches and heals with his body, a human body, can remind us how sacred our flesh can be and how our bodies can be a vessel for holy work.

It makes sense to me that John and Jesus's ministries would center the body— deeming the body not only important, but sacred and deserving of love and of God's touch. Because John and Jesus, our prophet and Lord, entered the world through Elizabeth and Mary. From the margins. To serve all of those living at the border.

I realize I am talking about bodies and touch in a time when we may feel disembodied – only seeing others through a screen or from a distance, missing the feeling of a physical touch. My prayer is that by turning inward, no matter where we are, we can seek God. We can meet God right in our bodies. We can feel that spiritual intimacy, a spiritual touch even... that nudges us and tells us that everything is going to be okay...

a spiritual nudge that gives us the hope and the strength we need now and, in this time, ...

As we all wait and prepare for the birth of Christ in our lives... as we inch closer to Christmas... preparing our trees, our altars our sanctuaries...outside of this physical place...

In the midst of all that weighs heavy on our hearts this holiday season, in a time of loneliness, physical separation, uncertainty, in a time when our daily lives, our annual traditions look differently, we need only to turn inward to find God... we do not need to reach far and wide...We can find God right here...we can find a holy temple right now... within ourselves...within our bodies. Amen.



