



**"BODIES MATTER"**

**SCRIPTURE: PSALM 139: 1-6, 13-18; I CORINTHIANS 6: 12-20**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

**January 14, 2018**

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18**

139:1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

139:2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

139:3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

139:4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

139:5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

139:13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

139:14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

139:15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

139:16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

139:17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

139:18 I try to count them -- they are more than the sand; I come to the end -- I am still with you.

**1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.

6:13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

6:14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

6:16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh."

6:17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

6:18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.

6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

6:20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

---

(Come to center, take off robe, sit on stool)

What are the first words you remember hearing someone else say about your body?

Don't think too hard about it, just let the memories, the words, the messages come.

Maybe you can't remember words. Maybe you remember gestures, moments, feelings—the way you were taught to feel about your body.

(take off my shoes—have a rag)

I don't really remember many early words about my body—I remember my mother rocking me and the vibration of her humming and the sound of her voice—that made every song a lullaby.

I remember coming in after a long day of playing outside, bare foot. My feet would be covered with dirt and the residue of asphalt. Our nightly ritual was to wash our feet—we had a special place reserved for our foot rags. "Look at these little feet!" My mom would say—"Just filthy!" "You have had quite a day!" "Get them good and clean—you'll sleep better if your feet are clean," she'd say.

And I can remember how good it would feel to get into bed with clean feet and a tired body—so tired from playing my legs would ache when I first lay down.

I learned to be attentive—to take a minute so my body could rest well. I learned the tender sound of my mother’s voice noticing all the living her daughters’ feet did that day.

Tenderness, acknowledgment, love—the sensations of mattering to someone who wants you thrive, who wants you to grow, who wants you to rest well and to know how to take care of yourself.

---

Like many of you—maybe like all of you—my relationship with my body has been complicated. I have struggled at times to be attentive, to acknowledge, to love my body—and some of the reasons why I have struggled are from right here in this book, in the Bible. (hold up Bible)

---

(go down to sanctuary)

**Corinth was a beautiful city by all accounts**—tucked inland between two oceans and protected on another side by mountains. Corinth was full of artisans—potters, metal workers. It was a diverse city with all kinds of religious practices—archeological findings indicate at least 12 different kinds of temples, altars, or shrines.

Corinth was influenced by many different cultures. Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Jewish. It was a colony of Rome, and so influenced by the culture of Empire.

There was no such thing as Christianity in Corinth—gatherings and emerging communities of Jesus followers were in their infancy. Paul was there probably a couple of decades after Jesus’ death.

**He was the father of that developing community of believers there.** And it in that patrilineal, patriarchal culture, the father was responsible for the moral quality of his family’s life. The father was the model for his family’s behavior and so Paul felt responsible for his young church—he felt responsible for its behavior.

**This was society of hierarchies and pecking orders. Everyone was beholden to someone.** And one’s behavior could bring shame or honor to whoever was your superior. A child’s behavior should not bring shame on a father’s house. An enslaved person should not bring shame on his owner’s house. Even the emperor was beholden to someone—to the gods, who he should glorify with his actions.

**Corinth wasn't just a beautiful place; it was a cruel place**—especially if you were poor. In fact Corinth had a reputation for being superficial, it was known as sin city. Harsh treatment of the poor was made even more brutal by the excesses of the wealthy.

And Corinth is where Paul went after Philippi and Thessalonica (these are the ones aka) to try and birth a beloved community— smack dab in the middle of sin city—a place where bodies were commodities, and excess was a way of life, where people used and abused other people's bodies, a place where the most important thing in people's lives were things like food and sex and alcohol.

**We have to read these verses with this context in mind.** Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church like a disappointed but determined father—of an impulsive teenager who used something his father said to authorize bad behavior.

(take out your Bibles) 1 Corinthians (In the New Testament, after the 4 Gospels, after Acts and Romans) Chapter 6, Verse 12

***Maxims—Paul did not reject, but he qualified. Rhetorical genius of his work here can get lost. Notice quotes. Know the teaching method, the rhetorical force of this pedagogical tool. Freedom in Christ should not be mistaken for anything goes.***

6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.

6:13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other.

***Hierarchical Culture—who is one's Lord?***

6:13b The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

6:14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

***Context of Sexual Immorality: What is Paul talking about here? Paul is all about community—and he is not about embodied conformity. 1 Corinthians is actually full of imagery about not just the beauty of embodied diversity, but the necessity of it for a community to truly be the Body of Christ (one body many gifts). The problem with being with a prostitute is not the sex; it is the way another person's body is being used as a commodity, for another person's pleasure. Jesus's body is a body that teaches us about mutuality, about vitality, about compassion, about healing. Mistaking sex with a prostitute for the intimacy of a***

***mutual sexual relationship is what Paul is calling out as a violation of the body's created purpose.***

6:15b Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

6:16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh."

6:17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

***Bodies Matter! Bodies are not the problem; our lack of regard for each other's bodies and for our bodies is the problem.***

6:18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.

6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

6:20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

***He is using a metaphor they could hook into immediately—the metaphor of having a Lord—of bringing glory, not shame or blame to one's Lord.***

***Paul's words to his wayward congregation are elegant and powerful—and they are about bodies redeemed in an incarnational faith. It is Christ who redeems our bodies for their created purpose, for their created goodness.***

---

Take this passage out of its context and it becomes dangerous—just like the Corinthian church used “All things are lawful for me” to justify their abusive behavior, Christians have used this passage about fornication to condemn, to excommunicate, and to abuse bodies—women's bodies, LGBTQ bodies, bodies that don't fit the white hetero-masculine western norms that we've been taught to use to judge and categorize bodies.

This passage and others like it have been used to fuel dogma and doctrine about sexual purity—and people have learned to be ashamed about their bodies, about their sexuality, about their ambiguity, about their very humanity.

This is one of the passages that taught me to hate my body when I was a confused teenager—trying to navigate what sexual violence meant for the moral status of my body. I was irredeemable—that's what I thought. My body was no longer a temple—it was in ruin and defiled.

Thank God, Jesus didn't leave my side in all those lonely years of hating my body—of trying to silence my body, of starving my body, of running it into the ground, of feeling separate, at a distance from my body and the things that happened to it.

It is Christ's tender, attentive, and loving presence that brought me back from the brink, to a place where I can hear Paul's words for what they really are—a love song—for you, for me, for us, for the whole wide world.

Because learning to love our bodies is not an afterthought for us Christians, its priority number one.

**It is our most powerful testimony to Jesus in our midst. What could be more important in the harsh world we call home today—to find ways to matter to each other, to find ways to cultivate true, inviolable mutual regard.**

---

(go back to stool)

John's gospel, the most incarnational of them all, has Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. That's what we get in John's gospel—no broken bread, no blood poured out, we get Jesus tending to the dirty feet of the people he cherished in his life.

This is how you follow me, he says. This is how you show the world you are with me, you are mine. You tend to the mundane details (foot washing back then like brushing teeth in our time) of each other's embodied lives with tenderness, with attentiveness, with love.

Because you see what Paul is trying to tell us is something we so desperately need to hear. We've got the whole "self-care" thing all wrong. When you care for your body you are not just caring for yourself, you are caring for your community. Care of your body is care for our Body. Care of your body is care of Christ's Body.

---

The church taught me about this robe—to put it on to show you my credentials, my social position in this church—that I am a teacher, someone academically trained.

I confess that for me, as a woman in ministry, this robe is more often about protection than it is about position. It can protect me from the hostility that so long ago controlled me, the hostility that taught me to disdain the body God gave me.

So, today I took it off, lest you mistaken this robe for some distance between us, and lest I hide behind it and not have the courage to speak the truth.

You and me, we are just the same—temples of the Holy Spirit, members of the Body of Christ, bodies fearfully and wonderfully made to live in mutual regard for one another.

(Put robe back on)

I am your pastor, a midwife more than a mother to you—here to reflect back to you the strength and capacity that I see in this gathered Body. We can give birth to something new together— a way of life in which bodies are cherished tenderly, attentively, and with love. Where we do no harm to each other. Where our mutual regard and support of each other is undeniable for any who come into contact with our community.

The sensations of mattering to someone, I can feel it now. I pray, my brothers and sisters, that you can feel it, too. Living this way together surely brings glory to the One who created us and called us good.

Thanks be to God.