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## *The Stories Our Bodies Tell*

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*Luke 24:36b-48*

Several weeks ago, I was in a conversation with one of you, a mom of young children. This parent shared about a difficult parenting moment that happened recently, and the way she dealt with it was just brilliant. Their child was having a conflict with a classmate, and the child was all wound up about it. This parent didn't launch into a lecture or reprimand – they just said, “How's your body feeling? Do you feel calm, or does your body need to feel calmer before you can talk about it?”

Brilliant. Our bodies tell stories, and this young one's body was telling a story. The story was “I am not ok.” He had to tend to that story before he could start to heal.

This is such deep wisdom, and not just for children. Our bodies carry so much. We don't just feel our feelings in our minds, in the abstract. We feel them in our bodies.

Our bodies tell stories. This mom knew that. Jesus's disciples knew that. The families of those beautiful children in Uvalde, Texas know that. Our bodies tell stories.

In Luke chapter 24, we find ourselves in the midst of the post-resurrection world of Jesus and his friends. Those days after his rising must have felt like an eternity and a blip, all at the same time. The gospel writers give us tiny glimpses into the time after Easter, and these stories are all about bodies and the stories they tell.

There's the time Mary mistakes the risen Jesus for a gardener, assuming that someone has robbed his body from the grave. She is shocked when he raises his voice to call her name, finally recognizing that it's really him.

There's the story where the disciples are huddled inside with the doors locked, terrified of what might be coming next. Jesus shows them his wounds, the marks of his death, and then they recognize that it's really him.

There's the story of the road to Emmaus, where it's not until the two travelers sit down and share a meal with their strange companion, filling their bodies with good food, that they recognize that the stranger is Jesus.

And of course, there's the story of Thomas, who we needlessly call "doubting Thomas," who we should really call "brave Thomas," he who needs to see the marks of the nails in Jesus's hands and put his hand in Jesus's wounded side before he'll believe that it's the risen savior. He's the brave one who asks what everyone else has been thinking - who says the quiet part out loud - "will you show us your wounds?" Thomas knows that our bodies tell stories.

In the text we just heard, the disciples again need to see the wounds in Jesus's body before they're able to process any bit of what has happened with his dying and rising. When Jesus appears before them, "peace!", they do not return his greeting because they're convinced he's a ghost. That's the only framework they have for someone dead somehow being back in their presence again - must be a ghost. And they don't seem happy about it - the words the gospel writer uses are "startled" and "terrified."

Now that we've walked through all these other post-resurrection stories, you won't be surprised to hear what Jesus does next. He shows them his body - his wounded, risen body, the one with the nail marks and rough scars, the one that witnesses to all that it has experienced within the lines and ridges of its very flesh. The disciples know that our bodies tell stories, and it's not until they see the pages of Jesus's story written on the surfaces of his body that they're ready to hear anything that he might say to them.

The disciples have been through an awful lot in these past days. The trauma of the crucifixion is close at hand. They need to know that Jesus is with them in that grief and trauma. That's why their belief is all tied up in his wounded hands and side. Those wounds prove his solidarity with them. If he'd risen with a new and pristine body, no evidence of what they'd all been through, his body would've told a story that was not true. Thanks be to God that his wounded body tells a story that is true. Hard, and true.

Our own wounded bodies have been through an awful lot in these past days. This Wednesday was the two-year mark since the murder of George Floyd here in our own city. Our bodies remember. The long minutes that led up to his death; the days of uprising; the movement for change that spread all across the country. And then the news out of Buffalo, and out of the church in Laguna Hills just last week. Our bodies remember.

The stories our collective body continues to tell are stories of racism and gun violence, unimaginable pain and unspeakable sorrow. What story did your body tell when you heard the news out of Uvalde, Texas on Tuesday? My body froze – tears didn't even fall, at least at first. And then I saw pictures of the children's faces on the news. I wonder if your body also told a story of anger. Did your chest tighten as you heard that statistic – there are more guns in this country than people? Did your fists clench as

you remembered Columbine and Sandy Hook and Parkland and the list goes on and on and on? And still nothing but empty words and partisan gridlock. Lord, have mercy on these wounded bodies.

In the days after Jesus rose from the dead, his friends need to know that his wounded body is still present with them, telling a story of solidarity. Jesus doesn't need to use words to prove that it's really him. He just shows them – touch me – it's ok – I promise it's really me. And then while they're still wondering and marveling – how is it really him? – Jesus does a funny thing. “Y'all have anything to eat around here?” He asks them to feed him. The host becomes the welcomed guest. So his disciples, still bewildered, give him a piece of fish. I imagine that as he extended his hands to receive the meal, the disciples could catch yet another glimpse of his wounds. It's really him, he's really with us, and he hasn't forgotten all we've been through.

Jesus is not one who forgets. He is one who remembers – whose very body remembers. Jesus does not forget the stories that our own bodies bear on their surfaces. The ten people in a grocery store in Buffalo, the person in a church in Laguna Woods, the twenty-one people in a school in Uvalde, the countless others whose wounds of body and mind will remain with them even though they lived. The national discourse will move on, but Jesus will not forget.

Our bodies tell stories. The story that Jesus's risen and wounded body tells is a story of solidarity – he cries with us, marches in the streets with us, writes letters to legislators with us, hugs our children with us as they leave for another school day, lumps in our throats, hands balled into anxious fists. Jesus dies with us, and he rises with us to new life, still bearing the brokenness of the world.

In Luke's gospel account, the very last thing Jesus does before he returns to God is say to his disciples, "You are witnesses." He tells them that they are to go out and be witnesses to all that they've seen and heard. All the preaching, teaching, healing, miracle-working, dying, rising – the disciples are to tell all of it. They are to share that witness with the world, long after Jesus is gone. They are to remind one another of the story that Jesus's body told, throughout the generations to come. They are to send forth that story of deep and abiding solidarity to a world that will continue to be wounded and healed, wounded and healed.

We, too, are witnesses of these things – we are sent forth just as the disciples were two thousand years ago. And to witness to the healing of a broken world... well, that requires our bodies, too. Writer and liturgist Cole Arthur Riley says this: "We cannot get free disembodied. There is no promised land without a tongue to taste the milk and honey. We may forsake the body in order to survive, but the truth is that we do so at our own peril."

The work of witnessing to the love and justice of Jesus is work that requires our bodies, wounded as they are. Jesus did not send us out without first showing us his scars, almost as if to say, “I’m wounded, just like you – now go out and tend to a wounded world.”

The mother I told you about earlier knew how to be a witness. She was letting her son know that he needed to listen to that which was wounding him – the ways that his hurt feelings were making his heart race and his chest feel tight. She was reminding him that he couldn’t heal without recognizing and naming the ways he was hurting. She was saying, “I see you; I believe you; we will heal together.”

This is the work of Jesus, the work of solidarity. We see the wounds in another, and their wounds will often not be our wounds. We can say, like Jesus, “I see you; I believe you; we will heal together.”

In just a moment we will sing about this solidarity. Bluegrass music so often helps us sing in the face of our woundings, even in the face of death. This next hymn, “Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song,” is a song of solidarity – we sing as we witness to Christ’s presence alongside us. It’s a hymn that comes from the L’Arche community. L’Arche is a global network of intentional communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live together. The hymn we’ll sing has become somewhat of an unofficial anthem for L’Arche. Listen to how it

invites us in and sends us out, how it reminds us that Jesus is with us, his woundedness alongside our own woundedness.

The final verse reads, "I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey, but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side. And with all of the family you saved by your love, we'll sing to your dawn at the end of your journey." Amen.