

The Body of Christ
John 20:19-31
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Rev. Leigh Curl-Dove

On the morning of July 21, 2007 I woke up and jumped out of my bed faster than I probably ever have in my life. It was a big day. It was THE day. I was going to find out everything I had ever wanted to know. All of my questions would be answered. On this day, every last puzzle piece was going to fall into place. I would finally know if Harry Potter was going to defeat the evil Lord Voldemort.

When I finally got to the store I ran to the Harry Potter display and took it all in, I took the seventh and final Harry Potter book in my hands and held it. I had no idea what the Deathly Hallows were, but knew I soon would. Once home, I went to my room, shut the door, and began to read knowing I would not emerge until I knew every last detail. Several hours later, I emerged from my room fully enlightened. The book was perfect and I finally knew everything I wanted to.

I love the Harry Potter series, but I do want to name that JK Rowling has caused many of her fans and others, particularly trans and nonbinary folks, pain in recent years with transphobic tweets and stances. Her transphobia is unacceptable. And quite frankly it is ridiculous and contradictory to Harry Potter, which is all about those who are different being accepted and included. It's a series about love, friendship, loyalty, and ultimately life winning out over death. So, I do not tell this story to support JK Rowling in any way, shape, or form.

In the years since that morning in July 2007, I have read and re-read and re-read and re-read the series, each time discovering something new, constantly struck by the new things I notice and just how profound the series is, but especially how profound the final book is. A few years ago on yet another re-read, I couldn't stop reflecting on the story of the Three Brothers which reveals what the Deathly Hallows are: the elder wand, the resurrection stone, and the cloak of invisibility. Three brothers meet Death, and Death speaks to them offering them each a gift, which become the deathly hallows. Each brothers' request involves acquiring a special power of some sort. The second brother asks Death for the power to bring people back from the dead. So, Death picks up a stone and gives it to the brother telling him that it has the power to raise the dead. When he returns home, the brother turns the resurrection stone three times in his hand. To his amazement, the girl he had once loved and hoped to marry appeared before him. But she was not the same. She was there but she wasn't. She wasn't exactly a ghost, but she definitely was not there in the flesh. She was not her without her body. She wasn't truly resurrected.

Jesus was not Jesus without his body, and his body had been broken and beaten. The breath had been taken from him, and with one final cry he breathed his last. And the disciples saw all of it. They saw their teacher, their friend whom they loved killed by Empire in the most brutal way imaginable. Jesus's breath was literally taken from him, and I imagine the disciples and all

those who loved Jesus felt like they had had the breath knocked out of them. Sure, Jesus had said he would die, but they didn't know it would happen like this. What were they supposed to do now?

When the disciples were locked up a few days later, hiding, and grieving together, I imagine they kept looking at each other with wide eyes, tired eyes, hoping someone would speak up and know what to do next. They had left everything behind to follow Jesus, and now he was gone. Sure Mary Magdalene said she had seen him this morning, but could that really be true?

Suddenly, without warning, Jesus stood before them. Their eyes opened even wider, tired no more, and their mouths opened just a little bit, some shouted because they were startled. Some weren't sure who it was at first and began to panic, and then they heard, "Peace be with you." And they could see it was Jesus, and he showed them the marks in his hands and his side, but none of them touched the marks. They weren't quite brave enough.

And Jesus, in his Jesus way, knew the disciples needed to breathe again. He knew that his execution had knocked the breath out of them, and so he performed, what episcopal priest and writer, Barbara Brown Taylor, calls "Divine CPR" on them. Breathing breath back into their empty lungs. Breathing the Holy Spirit onto them.

And Thomas missed it. He wasn't in the room, he didn't see Jesus. He wasn't divinely resuscitated. When his brothers tell him they have seen Jesus, he can't believe them. He needs to not just see Jesus for himself. He needs to touch the body of Christ. He needs to touch the marks of the nails and Jesus' side.

I've always felt bad for Thomas. He's known as a doubter, because he didn't believe Jesus had been resurrected. He's so often an example of what not to do. But I don't think he wanted to see and touch the nail marks in Jesus' hands and where the spear had pierced his side, because he doubted Jesus was really alive. I think he had to touch them, because he had to know that this resurrected Jesus, was still his Jesus. He had to know that it was the same Jesus he had watched talk to the woman at the well. The same Jesus who had cast out demons, healed lepers, raised Lazarus from the dead, and challenged empire again and again. He had to know it was the same Jesus who he had seen suffer and die. Jesus was not Jesus without his body. And Thomas needed Jesus, body and all.

"Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand, Thomas, and put it in my side."

And what Jesus says next to Thomas, has been translated incorrectly for centuries. It is why Thomas has been deemed "Doubting Thomas." The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (which we used today) translates it incorrectly, as did the non-updated edition. "Do not doubt but believe," is not what Jesus says to Thomas. The word doubt never appears in the text. Instead what Jesus says to Thomas is, "Do not be unbelieving but believe." Thomas wasn't doubting, he was refusing to believe. He even said so himself. If he had doubted, that would

have been okay because there is nothing wrong with doubt. There is nothing wrong with questions. There is nothing wrong with wanting to know a bit more.

Thomas could not, would not believe unless he felt the body of Christ himself for the marks of the nails and the wound in his side. And if he hadn't have stuck his fingers in those nail marks in Jesus' hands and the wound in his side, we wouldn't know that the crucified body of Christ is the risen body of Christ. And my friends, that is *everything*.

The resurrection shows us that nothing, not even death, can overcome Jesus' way of life and love and we talk all the time about how to follow Jesus. We cannot separate the way of Christ from the body of Christ, because everything he ever did, he did in his unique body. His body is an essential part of him, just as our bodies are an essential part of us.

Our bodies are a part of our identity, they are an essential part of us. My body is part of me, I am not me without my body. Everything that has happened to me, everything I have ever felt, experienced, and done has happened in my body. Just as everything that has ever happened to you, everything you have ever felt, experienced, and done has happened in your body. You are not you without your body. The resurrection shows us that bodies, bodies of all kinds—trans bodies, women's bodies, non-binary bodies, men's bodies, queer bodies, black and brown bodies, disabled bodies, young bodies, old bodies, middle-aged bodies, refugee bodies, unhoused bodies, indigenous bodies—*every* body matters in the here and now and the hereafter.

In 1996, singer-songwriter, Gillian Welch, released the song, "By the Mark." It's a song about Jesus' unique, distinct body—what happened to it, what it looks like, and how without his unique, distinct body, Jesus just isn't Jesus.

"By the mark where the nails have been
By the sign upon his precious skin
I will know my savior when I come to him
By the mark where the nails have been"

I love this song. I find comfort in it. I find assurance in it. It has a way of making me feel held. You might think that's morbid, because it is a song about knowing who Jesus is by the signs of his crucifixion, but those marks are how we know that Jesus did not leave what is most human about him behind. Jesus knows all there is to know about the worst kind of pain and abuse. He experienced it. He lived it. He died from it. And he came back from it.

The body of Christ—the physical, real, uniquely made in the image of God, human body of Christ—is what brings our physical, real, uniquely made in the image of God, human bodies into communion with Christ. Our bodies, our embodied-ness is what brings us into communion with each other here in this place and with all other embodied souls across time and space.