

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (B-RCL) – January 14, 2018

1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]; Psalm 139:1-6 {7-12} 13-28; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20;  
John 1: {35-42} 43-51

University Lutheran Church, Cambridge MA; Imogene A. Stulken

### *Ecumenical Prayer Cycle:*

*Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen*

[*Hold up hand mirror in front of face.*] Hmm, when did those gray hairs appear on *this* side of my bangs? And where did *those* wrinkles come from? Yeah, still more wrinkles on my left side. I wonder if I would have stopped sleeping on my left side if I had known before it was too late that sleeping on my side contributed to face wrinkles on that side. – Probably not . . . Oh, well!

**But... our bodies can be a poem** – my mirror thoughts remind me of a limerick my Dad used to recite to us kids:

As a beauty I am not a star,  
There are others more handsome by far;  
But my face -- I don't mind it,  
For I am behind it;  
It's the people in front that I jar.

["83 Fun Limericks," #33, <https://www.brownielocks.com/Limericks.html>, accessed 1.5.2018]

How many here have looked into a mirror at least once this morning? If so, what did you see? Were you pleased with what you saw? Were you critical? Were you grateful? Did you greet yourself with reverence? How did the reflected image of your body mesh with how you think of yourself? Did the mirror accurately reflect who you are? Or who you want to be?

In today's Second Reading, the apostle Paul writes to the Christian community in Corinth to address divisions in the church and to speak to issues that he thinks need correcting so that the believers may better live out their baptismal calling. In this reading, Paul makes frequent reference to "body". If I counted correctly, in the English translation we have in

front of us, the word “body” occurs 9 times in these 9 verses, plus there’s one occurrence of the plural “bodies.”

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “body”? What images do you see? What emotions do you feel?

On August 19, 2009, at the ELCA’s eleventh biennial Churchwide Assembly, the delegates adopted a social teaching statement. The document – “A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” – addresses the issue of body image:

A healthy sense of sexuality is related to having a healthy body image. This church teaches that caring for the body and following practices that lead to physical and emotional wellness are part of the stewardship of created goodness. It recognizes that a positive sense of one’s own body supports a healthy sense of one’s gender identity and sexuality.

[<https://goo.gldkiQJE>, p. 29]

For Christians, the ultimate message that God values bodies is the Incarnation of God in Christ – God taking on human flesh and dwelling among us. And that God cares for *bodies* can be clearly seen in the healing miracles of Jesus.

**A body can be bread.** On the night when the Lord was betrayed and handed over to be crucified, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, “This is my body that is for you.” [1 Corinthians 11: 23-24] After the resurrection, Jesus’ body is a genuine body: Still bearing the wounds of crucifixion, Jesus eats with the disciples. The stories of Jesus’ body “reflect the biblical ideas of the unity of the human person and the goodness of the human body.”

[Gail Ramshaw, “Body,” *Treasures Old and New: Images in the Lectionary*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, © 2002 Augsburg Fortress, p. 77.]

This “goodness of the human body” includes our sexual selves. I turn once more to the Social Statement on Human Sexuality:

We are sexual beings from the beginning of our lives. [pp. 27-28]

We recognize the complex and varied situations people have relative to human sexuality: being in relationships, being single, being a friend, living in a young or aging body, being male or female, being young or old, or having different sexual orientations and gender identities. In whatever the situation, all people are called to build trust in relationships and in the community. [pp. 8-9].

Far too often, though, the good gift of sexuality has been misused, abused, used as a weapon of domination and power – even of war. A few examples:

First, in an interview on NPR in late November, Gail Dines, professor of sociology and women’s studies at Wheelock College in Boston, addressed the issue of pornography. On average, boys first view porn at age 11. And 20 percent of sexts “are photos of children, mostly girls, 15 years old or younger.” [“Culture Reframed”, <http://www.culturereframed.org>, accessed 1.5.2018] To help address what she calls “the public health crisis of the digital age,” Gail Dines co-founded Culture Reframed, which is a “multidisciplinary team of experts and scholars” working “to promote healthy child and youth development, relationships, and sexuality.” [“About Us: Solving the Public Health Crisis of the Digital Age”, <http://www.culturereframed.org/about-us>, accessed 1.5.2018]

Second, January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month. By presidential proclamation again this year, January is also National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. Human trafficking – the trade of human beings through “force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of commercial sexual or forced labor” – is hugely profitable for traffickers – estimates I found range from 32 billion to 150 billion dollars per year. Unlike drugs, for example, trafficked persons can be used over and over and over again – and can thus continue to bring in money for their traffickers. This past April, UMass Lowell’s Greeley Scholar for Peace Studies was Noy Thrupkaew, an independent journalist, who, since 2006, has researched human trafficking and labor exploitation. She reminded us that human trafficking is all around us, and that behind the bargains we search for can be a hidden world of forced labor to keep prices low. (See: <https://www.acast.com/techtalks/businessnoy-thrupkaew-human-trafficking-is-all-around-you->

[this-is-how-it-works](#)) She told us: “Human trafficking isn’t just sex work . . . that’s only 22 percent of the reported cases. Most trafficking happens to people stuck in low-wage service industry jobs, such as working in hotels, laboring on farms or taking care of other people’s children.” Her interest in investigating human trafficking began when she learned that a nanny who had raised her for her first three years of life had been trafficked. [Greeley Scholar Shines Spotlight on Human Trafficking: Journalist Shares Stories on Campus and in the Community”, <https://www.uml.edu/News/stories/2017/Thrupkaew-Greeley-Scholar.aspx>, accessed 1.5.2018]

Third, according to a 2015 survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, 47% of transgender people report being sexually assaulted at some point in their lives, both in and out of the workplace.

[<http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers>, accessed 1.6.2018]

Additionally, these past few months have witnessed case after case of reports of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the entertainment industry and beyond, as victim-survivors have found courage to break years of silence to name their often high-profile perpetrators. In fact, The Silence Breakers were named Person of the Year 2017 by *Time*. But the silence was broken often at great personal cost – and in the face of justifiable fear of what would happen to them personally or professionally for breaking silence.

**Our bodies are a witness.** Last Sunday night at the Golden Globes, when she accepted the Cecil B. DeMille award, Oprah Winfrey acknowledged the unnamed victim-survivors of abuse and assault:

I want tonight to express gratitude to all the women who have endured years of abuse and assault because they, like my mother, had children to feed and bills to pay and dreams to pursue. They’re the women whose names we’ll never know. They are domestic workers and farmworkers. They are working in factories and they work in restaurants and they’re in academia, engineering, medicine and science. They’re part of the world of tech and in politics and business. They’re our athletes in the Olympics and they’re our soldiers in the military.

Oprah ended her remarks with these words of hope:

So I want all the girls watching here and now to know that a new day is on the horizon! And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women, . . . and some pretty phenomenal men, are fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say “me too” again.

[<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2018/1/18/30738-Oprah-Winfrey-delivers-a-powerful-message-at-the-Golden-Globes-A-new-day-is-on-the-horizon?detail=emaildkre>, accessed 1.8.2018]

Bodies are witnesses also to the conditions of the world around them. Trauma and mental or emotional stresses can be expressed in the body – manifesting simply as acne for example or as a cold, or as a more serious physical disease or mental illness. Our bodily situation can change instantly – a slip on the ice (and a broken bone or bruised body); a car accident (and a prescription for opioid pain killers); a sports injury (and the end of an athletic scholarship or a career). Our bodies can change gradually over time, as with the onset of dementia. Such changes may alter how people view themselves – or how others view them: But does that change the person – or does the person become less valuable?

**Our bodies are a temple.** For: “[D]o you not know,” writes Paul, “[D]o 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? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” [1 Corinthians 6:19-20]

Commentator Frank L. Crouch notes:

In the original Greek, the pronouns in this verse are plural....

So, it is appropriate to understand this personally -- “my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within me” -- and communally -- “this body of people, part of the body of Christ, is a temple of the Holy Spirit within us.” What I do (or don’t do) in my body matters. What we do (or don’t do) as a body of believers’ matters. [Frank L. Crouch, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20,” (Working Preacher from Luther Seminary), [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1168](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1168), accessed 1.10.2018]

How *do* we glorify God in our individual bodies? How *do* we care for the body of Christ? What difference would it make if we each wore a sash that said “fragile” or “handle with care” or even “not feeling well today”? What could happen if we remembered that our bodies – and the bodies of our neighbors – are temples of the Holy Spirit?

As I was pondering this text this past week, the marriage phrase “with my body I thee worship” popped into my head. *The Book of Common Prayer* of 1552 includes these words in “THE FOURME OF SOLEMNIZACYON OF MATRYMONYE.”: “With this ring I thee wedde: with my body I thee worship: and with al my worldly goodes I thee endow. In the name of the father, and of the sonne, and of the holy gost. Amen.” [[http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp1552/Marriage\\_1552.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp1552/Marriage_1552.htm), accessed 1.12.2018]

Granted, this marriage service was for a heterosexual couple, and it was only the groom who said these words. But imagine: What if, in the context of worship within the church; that is, within the body of Christ – what if both members of whatever couple made such a public promise to honor one another’s bodies. [Seminary president] Sara Wenger Shenk suggests that: “It’s about reclaiming the dignity of our flesh-and-blood bodies, refusing to cheapen that dignity, and respecting boundaries that honor that dignity.” [Sara Wenger Shenk, “With my body I thee worship,” *The Mennonite*, 6.5.2015; <https://themennonite.org/feature-with-my-body-i-thee-worship>, accessed 1.11.2018]

And what if we were to extend that sense of honoring one another's bodies beyond our partners, beyond our immediate kin?

UniLu’s “honoring the bodies of others” has been shown in providing care for shelter guests, and offering sanctuary for a mother and her daughters. The rainbow of Adirondack chairs and spaces for LGBTQ communities; the “Black Lives Matter” and the “Hate Has No Home Here” signs; the work of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO); the prayers for community members and for the sake of the world – these and other actions bear witness to the larger community that bodies matter, and that what we do matters.

So: **Look anew into the mirror:** What do you see now?  
Not acne or braces; not gray hair or wrinkles (though they may still be there). No, nothing like that. Rather, can you see the temple of the Holy Spirit?  
It is within you.

**Our bodies are God's poem:**

For you are a beauty and a star,  
And while there may be others more handsome by far,  
It is *your* face -- you don't mind it,  
For *you* are behind it,  
And God loves you as you are.

[Reworking of opening limerick by daughter Kerstin Brolsma]

## **A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (*Selections from*)**

<https://goo.gl/dkiQJF>

*("This social teaching statement was amended and adopted by a two-thirds vote (676-338) by the eleventh biennial Churchwide Assembly on August 19, 2009, at Minneapolis, Minnesota")*

A healthy sense of sexuality is related to having a healthy body image. This church teaches that caring for the body and following practices that lead to physical and emotional wellness are part of the stewardship of created goodness. It recognizes that a positive sense of one's own body supports a healthy sense of one's gender identity and sexuality. [p. 29]

Sexually mature, healthy individuals learn to be comfortable with their bodies and are able to entrust themselves to others. They call frankly upon others to respect and honor their privacy, their bodily integrity, and their wishes concerning welcome and unwelcome touch. [p. 29]

Sometimes, it can be very hard to develop and maintain positive attitudes about one's body. Too many people struggle for a healthy sense of body as a result of experiences of degradation or shaming by others, including family members and intimate partners. This church will support all in affirming and reclaiming a sense of healthy sexuality. [p. 29]

This church calls attention to the danger of embracing standards of physical attractiveness that exclude many, including the aged and people with disabilities, and which distort the understanding of what it means to be healthy. The young, whose bodies are changing and growing, may be especially vulnerable to idealized and commercialized images of a "perfect body" that play on insecurities and destructive self-loathing. [p. 29]

We are sexual beings from the beginning of our lives. The ancient psalmist envisioned the divine mystery of our embodied lives long before science investigated our biological and genetic complexity: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). The realities of our sexual bodies are visible in physical features and powerful in less visible characteristics. [pp. 27-28]

We recognize the complex and varied situations people have relative to human sexuality: being in relationships, being single, being a friend, living in a young or aging body, being male or female, being young or old, or having different sexual orientations and gender identities. In whatever the situation, all people are called to build trust in relationships and in the community. [pp. 8-9].

Thus, Christ-like love for the neighbor informs all our activities, sexual and otherwise, now and into God's future. In anticipation of that future, the ethics of sexuality is thus

not purely a personal matter, but one that affects the witness of the Christian community and the well-being of the larger community (1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 6:10; Revelation 21:8). [p. 6]