



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL





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The theme for this Lenten devotional is *This is My Body*. As we journey through this season of Lenten together, you are invited to remember the story of Advent is about God taking on a physical body like ours. *This is My Body* explores how Jesus lived in his body on earth and invites us to take care of and embrace the goodness of our own bodies.

Each week highlights a different story from Jesus' life and connects it to shared human experiences—like growing up, taking naps, or drinking water. By engaging with these stories through a broad lens of embodiment, *This is My Body* seeks to inspire curiosity, wonder, and awe in all ages.

This Lent, we will celebrate how God came to be human and lived among us. We encourage you to explore how these ideas and themes influence how you view God, your faith, and the world.

We would love to hear what was helpful and meaningful, as well as any suggestions and comments you have for improvement. Your feedback helps us continue to create quality faith formation materials. You can reach us at info@illustratedministry.com or find us on the following social networks:

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Peace be with you!

Illustrated Ministry



WEEK ONE

Luke 2:41–52

A few years ago, our church had a big anniversary, and people who had been part of the congregation over the years returned to mark the occasion. I ended up in a conversation with folks who lived in different cities now—work had taken them to Los Angeles, to Portland, to Seattle—but they’d grown up in that church together. They swapped stories about what it had been like: the life-changing trips they took, the hide-and-seek games where they’d holed up in the baptistry tub, the silly plays they performed to great applause from their elders. We were in the sanctuary, and one of them looked down at his feet and said, “And I’ll never forget about these wood floors!” They laughed and laughed at some inside joke, and, as the newcomer, I had to ask, “What about the

wood floors?”

The wood floors had been perfect, these reunited friends explained, for sliding on. As kids, they’d get on their bellies and scoot around the sanctuary, under the pews, sliding by the feet of those still seated. They’d make their way all over the floor, lifting their toes so they were virtually silent, long gone before the grown-ups noticed what was happening or could catch them. The floors were always waxed, they said, before Christmas and Easter, so on those occasions, the floors were the slipperiest, the best for sliding.

As I listened to them reminisce, I thought about all of the ways people know they are welcome. Welcome can be written on signs and spoken in announcements, but it’s memories like the ones these friends shared that really communicate acceptance and home. It’s stories like this one told about young Jesus that reveal a community’s true commitments and values: *Yes, you can scootch on your belly. Yes, you can pester the teachers. Yes, we will let you play here. And yes, we will take you seriously. It is you who make this space*

your own, and you are welcome here.

He could have been turned away. Jesus could have approached these teachers with a question, an idea, an interpretation he'd been wondering about, and they could have easily—even politely—turned him away. They could have told him that class was over. They could have instructed him to ask his parents. They could have reminded him everyone was headed home, and folks would probably be looking for him soon.

There's so much we don't know in this story. We don't know if Jesus knew his family was leaving. We don't know if he hid out deliberately so they wouldn't see him stay behind and would just assume he'd run up ahead of them, already on his way. We don't know if the teachers encouraged him to go and then eventually gave up, figuring his parents would return at some point. We don't know if Jesus was stalling, rebelling, testing boundaries, or if these questions were so pressing for him he just couldn't think about anything else. We don't know if he was the only one, or if he had friends who were also

less than eager to return home after this big trip. Maybe ten or twenty years later they would meet up again, at the holidays, and reminisce about the time they worried all the grown-ups so much, when they were just trying to ask some questions.

We know Jesus was a thoughtful, curious kid—an adolescent, really—whose parents and teachers both cared for him and wanted to keep him safe. We know he didn't fully understand their concern. We know he was trying to more fully understand himself, his community, the tradition to which he belonged.

In that sanctuary—the one with the sometimes-slippery floors—picking up the left-behind papers after a service one day, I found a crumpled bulletin with a guess the letters game drawn on it. The handwriting gave away the players were most likely elementary-aged. The guesser had solved the puzzle before they ran out of attempts, because the whole thing was filled in.

On those pencil-dashed lines was spelled out:

I C A N N O T W A I T F O R
C O M M U N I O N .

I thought about who I'd seen that day, about who might have written that phrase for their friend or sibling to decode. The impatience made me smile. Communion at our church is basic—tiny squares of gluten-free bread and little cups of store-bought grape juice. It's not a snack you look forward to because you're hungry, or because it's delicious. But it is a ritual we all partake in together, a time we remind ourselves of our ties to one another, and to all that is sacred.

So much of what we do together is both a simple activity and a profound mystery. Sharing bread and juice, asking questions and listening to answers, scooting along a slippery floor or laughing at the memory of it—our lives are filled with ways to explore, ways to nourish one another, ways to know our connectedness and celebrate our belonging. Thanks be to God for all of it.

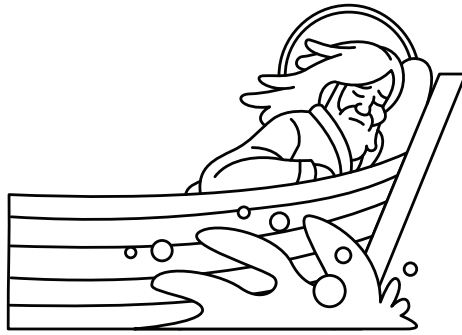
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What's a question, or a scripture, or an idea, you could talk about for days on end?

What questions do you think the teachers had for one another, after Jesus finally left?

When have you known that even despite some difference—be it age or experience or some other identity marker—you were fully welcome? What did it feel like? What made you trust it?

If you could ask any of your teachers any question, who and what would you ask?



WEEK TWO

Luke 8:22–25

I wonder how tired Jesus was when he and his friends set out on this trip. I wonder how much he'd been looking forward to this nap. I wonder if he'd been thinking about it all day—his eyes heavy, his mind weighed down—and if he'd told himself, “Once we get on the water, then I can rest.”

Maybe not. Maybe he'd come aboard full of energy, but the sun and wind on his face, the gentle rocking of the boat on the waves, lulled him into a sleepy state. Maybe it was rest he didn't know he needed until he was out on the water, far from the demands of the crowds. Maybe he found himself, for the first time in a while, without a litany of needs to meet, and he decided to escape to some peace and quiet before they landed on the other side

of the lake where he'd surely be greeted with more of the same.

What must it have taken for Jesus to rest his eyes, his mind, and his body enough to fall asleep? What does it take for you to rest?

I have a hard time getting good rest if I'm concerned about something—if a project is unfinished, or a friend is unwell, or a situation is unsettled. Even knowing good sleep is almost always a help, not a hindrance, the worries rattling around in my mind sometimes keep that rest from coming. Resting can feel like relinquishing control, and sometimes, I prefer to stay awake and under the illusion that if I try enough, work enough, care enough, I can fix whatever is wrong in my world, or in the world.

Tricia Hersey, the founder of The Nap Ministry, reminds us those illusions are not only untrue, they are dangerous. When we do not prioritize rest, we suffer in real ways. When we lose sleep, we lose our capacity to question, our impulse to imagine, and our ability to heal from trauma, all of which deep rest has been proven to encourage. Rest

reminds us we do not belong to what Hersey calls “grind culture,” the system produced by capitalism and white supremacy which treats human bodies as machines meant only to perpetuate those systems. Rest is active resistance to that injustice; it returns us to ourselves and to our divine belonging.⁽¹⁾

Consider the deep trust Jesus must have had to fall asleep on the boat: trust in his friends to sail the vessel; trust in the water, that primeval symbol of chaos, to not swallow them up; trust in the vessel to carry him and his friends safely to the other side. And if rest only deepens our well-being, he must have been even more grounded in that trust when his friends came to shake him awake.

It’s easy to imagine that as his travel companions, they might have needed naps, too. It’s easy to imagine the need that confronted them every day left them weary, wishing they could do more. It’s easy to imagine the struggles they’d seen along the way haunting their sleep at night. It’s easy to imagine because we’ve lived it too, right?

The waves get bigger, and angrier,

beginning to wash away their trust that they will be alright. All the forces coming at them looked like something they couldn't fight. So they come to wake him up, and when they do, they're convinced not only that they can't fight this storm, but that it will do them all in. He faces the storm, and it recedes.

And for once, all is calm. Not like the waters had been moments before. Not like the land had been when they set out. Not like the land would be when they pulled up to shore on the other side. But for that moment, all is calm.

And the stillness washes over Jesus' friends, and leaves awe and wonder in its wake. It quiets their concern. They unclench their muscles, and they remember to breathe. They rest, even if only for a moment. But that moment is enough: when they do, their capacity to question, their impulse to imagine, their ability to heal, begins to return. It's the rest following this storm that gives rise to the most pressing question in the Gospels: Who, then, is this?

One of the myriad answers given over

the millennia people have been asking that question is: this is One to whom all who are burdened, all who are heavy-laden, can come, and find true rest, remembering their divine belonging.

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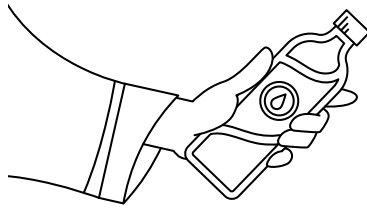
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do you tend to handle the storms in your life? What has proven helpful? What hasn't?

Who, or what, in your life encourages you to rest, to be still, to let go?

What are some ways you prioritize your own well-being?

Have you experienced deep rest as healing?
Can you share that story?



WEEK THREE

John 4:1-29

Water is a fundamental human need and a widely-recognized sacred element. We cannot live without it, and we mark meaningful life transitions with it. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights names water as a basic human right and directs every government to work to ensure all people have access to clean and safe water, while noting that 2.1 million people currently do not. Religious traditions around the globe recognize the power of water to quench thirst and to aid growth, to cleanse and purify, to heal and to destroy, to baptize and make new. Water matters, both to our survival and our thriving.

There are several reasons for this woman's surprise that Jesus asked her for water. Their differing genders erected a social barrier between them. Their differing ethnicities carried a history of conflict between them. Their similar positions—on their own, at a communal gathering spot at a time of day when it was expected to be empty—signified them both as outcasts. Her initial question to him—"how is it that you're speaking to me?"—isn't rude; it's honest.

And there are two answers he could give, both of them true, both of them significant.

One is: he has come on earth to live a new way, to teach a love of self and other and God which sees those outward distinctions not as reasons to keep people apart but as lenses through which people can be curious about each other—ways by which people can understand more and more about the beauty and complexity of the Creator, whose image is reflected in everyone.

Another is: he is thirsty.

He is tired—worn out from his journey—

and he is thirsty. And sometimes basic needs win out over social conventions. Sometimes our bodies know truths deeper than externally-imposed boundaries. Jesus could have let their differences keep him away from the woman, but his exhaustion and his need for refreshment felt more real, and more worth paying attention to, than the prejudices he'd heard and learned from his context.

He opts to answer her with a sort of middle ground between the spiritual and the physical—sticking with a focus on water, infusing the dialogue with some theological identity statements, and raising even more questions in the mind of his conversation partner.

He's lucky she indulges him in this conversation—in part because it gets interesting, in part because he doesn't have a bucket. He's at the well, but he cannot quench his thirst alone. He needs her help. And his vulnerability, his admission of need, is also a place where they can connect. Whatever their differences, they have this elemental

commonality: they both need water.

Have you ever asked for help to meet a fundamental need?

A hospice nurse told me the most meaningful part of her job is also the most basic: wetting the mouth of a person who is dying. It's not specialized work, she said; anyone could do it. But it is essential. As a person goes through the dying process, their body naturally begins to dehydrate. A dying person also tends to breathe with their mouth open, which dries it out. The dryness is a source of real discomfort. And so, once an hour, she will wet a small sponge attached to a stick and swirl it in the person's mouth, wetting the insides of their cheeks, their gums, their tongue, and the roof of their mouth. Sometimes the person will suck the water from the sponge; sometimes they aren't strong enough to do that.

This nurse said her job is about providing care in many different ways—administering medicine, bathing a person, turning them over, speaking comfort and peace to them and to their loved ones, and filling out paperwork,

so all the details of care are understood and managed correctly—but this one, maybe the simplest, is when she knows herself most connected to her patient, and to be doing the most good. It is one of the last acts of kindness a person receives. The water meets the need of the body; the giving and receiving of it meets the need of the spirit.

In the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus sends his friends out to continue the ministry of teaching and healing they'd been doing with him, he warns them about some of the difficulties they might encounter. If people are inhospitable, he advises his friends, move on. But anyone who offers them “a cup of cold water,” Jesus says, “will not lose their reward.”

From the swirling depths at creation to the parting of the Red Sea at the exodus to the raging storm Jesus calms, water takes center stage in some of the most dramatic stories of our faith. This story reminds us God's Spirit is also at work in the modest movements, like strangers sharing stories—and becoming co-ministers of the Good News!—over a cup of cold water.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

List some literal ways water matters to your life. List some ways water has been meaningful to you as a symbol.

Besides a drink when you are thirsty, how else do you refresh your body? Your spirit?

Can you remember a time you've connected with someone—maybe someone very different from you—over a shared basic need?

How hard is it to admit your vulnerability? What are the risks in that? What are the gifts?



WEEK FOUR

Luke 5:12–16 &
Luke 8:42b–50

I am an Owl.

A Four.

An INFP.

My strengths include input, empathy, and connectedness.

All of these different code languages point in the same direction: the ways I understand and move in the world, where I struggle and where I thrive, how I fit in a community, the gifts I bring, and the needs I carry.

Have you taken these tests—the Animal in You, the Enneagram, the Myers-Briggs, the Strengths Finder? There are others, I’m sure. What do they tell you about who you are? How accurate do you find them to be? Have

you been surprised, affirmed, or challenged by what these tests suggest to you or about you?

None of the tests have right or wrong answers. It's not better to be a Three than a Seven, not worse to be a weasel than a walrus. Each personality type—like each person—has areas where they excel easily and areas where they have to put in more effort. Teachers of the Enneagram are quick to remind their students it can be helpful to know someone else's number, not for the purpose of judging or making assumptions about them, but so we might have a bit more compassion. We'll recall, for example, that while an Eight might read a situation in one particular way and shape their response around those truths, a Nine is bound to notice other elements in the mix, and respond according to what they notice. Both are needed. Both see pieces of what is real.

For all we (think we) know about Jesus, these two stories remind us he was not a character or a caricature, but a real person, complete with his own gifts and needs and

hopes, his own ways of understanding and moving in the world.

Remember the line about crowds gathering to hear him and be cured of their diseases, and him withdrawing to the quiet, empty places to pray? A classic introvert move. The story doesn't tell us Jesus ignored those people, or withheld his teaching or his healing from them. It tells us he couldn't be with them all the time. He needed to let his spirit be still, his body rest and recuperate. Some people gain energy from being in crowds; they're nourished when they're surrounded by noise and activity and feel most fully themselves in those moments. Other people need time away and alone to feel well and whole. In this story, Jesus engages both with those who are asking for him and with what his inner self was asking.

Every person he encounters also has their own story, their own gifts and needs and hopes, their own ways of understanding and moving in the world. These two scriptures give us characters who seem opposite of each other, at least in their tactics: one calls out to

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Jesus, drawing attention to himself and his illness, asking directly for Jesus to intervene. The other comes quietly through the crowd, trying to remain unnoticed, hoping to reach out and take what she needs without troubling Jesus at all.

Their methods are different, but their motives are the same: they both seek healing. They both trust Jesus can offer it. Do they both trust he will?

One makes his request in a crowded setting, with the potential of others listening in. Is he hoping the public nature of his ask will ensure Jesus' "yes"? The other doesn't ask at all, just hopes if she makes some contact, it will be powerful enough to get her what she needs. Is she afraid if she approaches Jesus directly, she'll be turned away?

Different though they may be, they all use their bodies to communicate. Their bodies are the sites of their illness and their healing, their pain and their joy, their isolation and their connection. The first bows. The second stretches. Jesus responds to both.

Both characters honor what happens to them, and the role Jesus plays. The first asks before he is healed. “I know you can,” he tells Jesus. “If you want to heal me, please do.” It’s a slight but significant moment, a meaningful kindness: acknowledging Jesus as a person with his own will, preferences, and choices to make, not just as a dispenser of whatever those around him might yearn for. The second tells her story after she is healed. We don’t have her words, but we do have this recorded memory: when she realizes Jesus is shaken by what she’d done when he voices his need for understanding, scared as she is, she honors his need by offering up her story and allowing for a moment of connection between them.

This exchange makes me wonder if the power that had gone out from Jesus didn’t just transfer to her, but instead is now shared between them. It makes me wonder what kind of healing, what kind of power is available to all of us when we listen closely, ask questions thoughtfully, and willingly share from our gifts and needs and hopes.

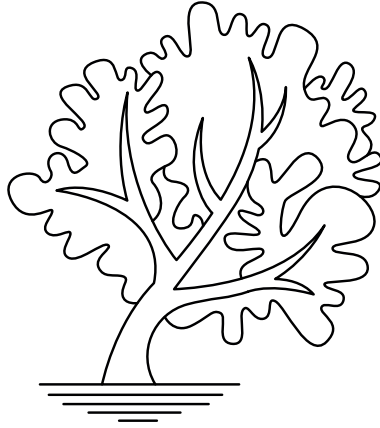
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are some ways you are similar to others in your family or friend group?
What are some ways you are different from them?

What are some ways you make your own needs known?

How have you used your body to heal, help, or connect with others?

Can you remember a time when someone was sensitive to a unique need of yours?
What happened? How did it make you feel?



WEEK FIVE

Matthew
21:18–22

Not long ago, on a weekday, a woman came into the church where I work very upset—screaming at everyone and no one, kicking at the air, tearing fliers for upcoming events off of bulletin boards. She is a woman without a stable housing situation, and she’s often in jail serving short stints for trespassing. When she’s released again, she can be agitated, or angry, or feel like everyone is against her. On this day, when I found her in that mood, I asked if she wanted to drink tea and talk about it—whatever “it” was that was troubling her. She considered the request for a while, then snapped back, “I want to drink tea and *not* talk about it.”

I got us each a cup of chamomile and led her to my office. We sat facing each other,

sipping our tea, neither of us speaking. Thirty minutes went by. Eventually, she picked up her bag, rustled around in it, zipped it up again, and rose to leave. She didn't speak to me on her way out.

I've seen her a few times since. She's not mentioned this encounter again. I've wondered: did she just need some quiet? Some stillness? Did she just need to be indoors? Or in someone's company who wasn't asking anything of her? I don't know. I'll probably never know. But the more I reflect on it, the more impressed I am by her knowing herself so well, by her lack of fear in articulating her request, by her ability to sit in the silence for as long as she needed it, and to leave when she no longer did.

I don't always know myself that well. Or I let social convention guide my requests and behaviors, even if they're not what I know deep down would be best for me. But as the person on the receiving end of her unconventional request, I wasn't bothered by her boldness. It was refreshing, actually, and I'm hopeful I can learn to do the same when I need to.

People in recovery from addiction often use the HALT tool as a reminder to check in with their bodies and assess their own well-being before they act. HALT is an acronym for hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. Some people have reminders set on their devices to assess these conditions throughout the day. Some people keep a diary recording these states. Some ask friends to check in with them if they're starting to get upset or feeling not quite themselves.

For people in recovery, these states are dangerous because they can make relapse more likely. But for all of us, when we're not paying attention to what our bodies are needing or asking for, we can do damage to ourselves and those around us. Parents of young children learn quickly: if their baby or toddler is fussy, it's often because they haven't gotten a nap in yet, or because they want to nurse or snack. There were years when my kids were young that I always had apples or carrot sticks or granola bars in my bag. And in my glove compartment. And in my coat pocket. I don't know when that stopped, but it would be a good practice still; even

though they're teenagers now, lack of sleep or sustenance can still swing their moods (and, let's be honest, mine too) in significant ways.

The scripture tells us Jesus was hungry. And when the fig tree didn't offer up what he hoped it would, what he expected it to, he destroyed it. The disciples were "amazed," and I'm reminded of other occasions in scripture where "amazed" is partnered with "afraid" to describe their reaction to something Jesus has done—like on the boat when he spoke the storm into stillness. There is power in Jesus' words and actions, and they're not quite sure how to understand it. Maybe they learned to carry granola bars in their pockets after this, just in case.

Jesus' short speech here intrigues me. I wonder if he knew what would happen to the fig tree when he spoke that curse. I wonder if he was surprised at the effect his words had. I wonder if his statement to the disciples—"whatever you ask for, you will receive"—was spoken as a promise, or a warning, or maybe both—if maybe he was processing out loud what they'd all just seen happen.

Mark's version of this story—but not Matthew's—tells us there are no figs on the tree “because it was not the season for figs.” If Jesus had paused to assess his own state—his own hunger, anger, loneliness, or tiredness—I wonder if he would have had more consideration for the season of the fig tree. I wonder if deeper self-awareness might lead all of us toward more compassionate treatment of the other lives around us.

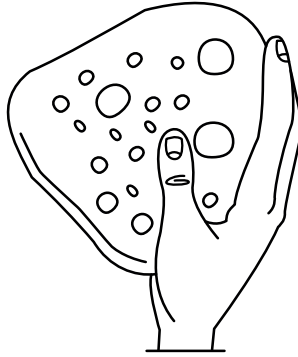
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

If you were among Jesus' friends who witnessed this event, how might you have responded? What questions might you have asked Jesus?

Do you have a tool—like HALT—which encourages you to be aware of and attentive to your own needs? How does it work for you?

Can you tell the story of a time you experienced vulnerability due to hunger, anger, loneliness, or tiredness?

What do you hear in Jesus' words, "whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive"? When has this been true in your life? When has it challenged you?



WEEK SIX

Mark 14:12-42

“This is my body,” Jesus tells his friends.

Of all the things he could have said to them at the last meal they would share together, that’s what he says. He blesses and breaks off a piece of bread and tells them, “this is my body,” as he passes it around.

And this is what they will remember. They will remember his teachings, and his care for them and for everyone and everything, and they will remember his body: his voice calling their names, his arms reaching out in welcome, his hands healing the sick, his feet dancing at weddings, his legs walking the distance to reach anyone in need. They will remember the ways they were with him: learning, serving, feasting, fasting, celebrating, mourning, loving. These were

their bodies, together.

Jesus is asking them to remember not just the ideas he invited them to consider but the presence he practiced with them. And they will. With the gifts and the limitations of their own bodies, they will remember. There's a hint of those limitations in the garden after dinner, when Jesus leaves them to pray and returns to find them asleep. "The spirit is willing," he tells them, "but the flesh is weak."

Is he worried about their bodies? Does he fear they will shut down, or scatter? Will the presence they practiced as a community be too hard to maintain when their gatherings are marked by such a significant absence? When they come together to share bread without him, will the brokenness be more palpable than the blessedness?

Sometimes, the willingness of our spirits can make our flesh capable of more than we've thought possible. I learned from a coach somewhere early on in my life-long commitment to slow, occasional running that we can run whatever distance we have run, plus half. So, if I *have* run four miles,

my body *can* actually do six. If I *have* run six miles, I *can* do nine. That mental note makes possible more distance than my flesh might feel, in the moment, like it can carry me through. If the spirit is willing, the flesh is often quite capable.

But sometimes, it's not. Sometimes, we are like Jesus' friends, and our bodies betray our best intentions. We want to stay awake until our partner comes home, but we fall asleep on the couch waiting. We head to the aquatic center to swim laps and find ourselves soaking in the hot tub instead. We turn down an invitation to go out and choose a quiet night in, or maybe we leave a quiet home in search of noise and activity and other people. We can't always explain these choices. We might even feel like we didn't make them.

But we are not good minds and bad bodies. Our selves cannot be portioned off into pieces that are fundamentally at odds with each other. We are integrated beings, entirely the work of our Creator, fully blessed and wholly good. And each part of us carries some wisdom worth our attention.

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Consider when a roommate is feeling unwell. Maybe they sleep later than usual. Maybe they wake up worried about what they missed. Maybe they start hurrying to catch up, to make right all that is wrong, now that it's ten o'clock in the morning instead of eight.

You don't let them, right? You tell them to slow down, to sit down. To hang out on the couch for a while. You offer to make them toast or a cup of tea. You say you can call their teacher, their workplace, and explain the situation. You let your roommate know their schedule might say one thing, but their body is telling them something else. You encourage them to pay attention to what it's saying. You remind them their body knows what it needs.

In our story, Jesus has gone to pray. He is dreading what's to come, and he is feeling the weakness of his own flesh; he knows how vulnerable he is. He's hurt the disciples don't keep vigil with him in the way he's asked. But their bodies also have a kind of wisdom. They know the looming loss, and they are mourning in ways they can't even articulate

yet. Their bodies are shutting down as a protective measure, to guard them against the grief becoming all-consuming. They need rest, so that when they rise, they can continue with the work that will soon be solely theirs.

Sometimes the weakness of our flesh is also a kind of wisdom.

Sometimes the brokenness of our bodies is also a kind of blessedness.

These are our bodies, the disciples might say then. Blessed and broken like the bread they were nourished with, like the body of the One who shared that bread with us. These are our bodies, with arms to open wide, feet to carry us far, voices to share the stories of the One who loved us so.

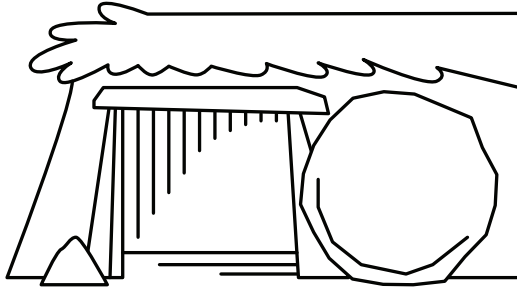
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What do you imagine Jesus felt at the meal, and in the garden? What might have been happening in his body as he sat with the disciples, as he shared bread with them, as he named his betrayal, as he prayed?

When you are struggling, what are some ways you can nourish yourself—body, mind, spirit? What are some ways you have received nourishment from others?

When have the capabilities of your own body surprised or delighted you? When have your body's limitations frustrated you?

Describe a time you listened to the wisdom of your body.



WEEK SEVEN

John 21:1–14

Maybe by now, they shouldn't be surprised. Mary had come first, telling them something wasn't right. Or maybe it was quite right—but it wasn't what she'd expected. She'd gone to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. A few of them followed her back and confirmed the story: no body in sight.

After they left, she told them she'd seen him, spoken with him; he'd called her by name.

Then there was the time he came through the locked doors of the room where they'd been hiding out. He came and spoke peace to their frightened hearts.

And if all of that wasn't enough—if all of that could be explained away by their grief

and longing, their hoping too hard, their minds playing tricks on them, manufacturing visions and voices—then there was Thomas.

Thomas wouldn't believe the stories unless he could not only see Jesus' image or hear his voice, but he needed to touch Jesus' wounds. And Jesus showed up for that, too, letting his friend place his fingers in the sores on his side, answering any lingering questions with his scarred skin.

So, to find him on the shore, making breakfast—it's kind of wonderful, but not completely surprising. The disciples are having to get used to the reality of resurrection:

Jesus is gone, and now he is here.

Everything has changed and so much remains the same.

They are on their own, and they are not alone.

What might be surprising is just *how real* this new reality is. How visible. How audible. How tangible. How much it smells like fresh-baked bread and grilled fish. How much it feels like an ordinary gathering of friends

around a campfire. How the blessed, broken body of not-so-long-ago is present with them again, offering bread again, and this time, making it clear they also have something to offer.

Biblical scholar Richard Swanson tells us this insistence on food—Jesus’ asking for fish in an earlier story, cooking and serving it in this one—“implies that Resurrection works out its meaning in the real world, not in heaven.”⁽²⁾

This means the blessedness and brokenness and the body all matter to Jesus. Bodies are who and how we are. Jesus’ resurrection affirms bodies as good and as deserving of good—as holy, and how God happens in the world.

Consider the bodily experience he had and the experience of his friends and disciples. Those who passed down this story must have felt its terror and joy deep in their bones. They knew hunger. They knew the insecurity of wandering during the day without a place to lay their heads at night. They knew occupation and war. They’d just

seen their friend tortured and executed by the state. There was no reason to believe they wouldn't be next.

And they knew more. They knew sickness and healing. They knew storms at sea, and the feeling of being held when they were soaked and shivering and scared. They knew rejection, and they knew feasting at the welcome table.

For Jesus to come back and cook fish and bread, for him to invite them to gather again around a meal, to nourish themselves together, is reaffirmation that this glorious, horrifying, complicated world, and our humanity within it, matter.

Beyond his fishing advice, beyond his waiting for them at the shore, beyond the meal he's already preparing for them, his asking them to throw some food on the fire is the real gift of this story. It's as if he's reminding them all of life is a potluck, and they have so much to offer to it. 153 fish! They hadn't known where to try at first, but a slight shift yielded unexpected abundance. Jesus receives what they bring and offers it back to them.

And when he does, they know that like him, like the bread, they also are blessed and broken. Everybody, *every body*, is. Sometimes it takes a little while—or a slight shift—to figure out what we do with that truth. Sometimes, the hurt of it remains even as the healing happens. Sometimes, the healing feels far off, as we continue to witness the crucifixions of our own context, the injustices still plaguing our world.

But to his own real world and to ours, Jesus comes back. He gathers and feeds his friends and assures them the abundance they have collected—their stores of fish and memory and hope and song and prayer and power and love—will be the nourishment they need.

They go from there, and they share it. And because they do, the story finds us. We receive it with our own hurting and hopeful hearts, our own doubting and faithful spirits, our own vulnerable and powerful bodies. And in response to the age-old invitation, we lug our own nets to shore, ready to receive nourishment from one another, trusting God's world can use what we bring, too.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What might the disciples have been feeling—in their bodies, their minds, their hearts—on the boat and then on the shore as the morning of this story unfolded?

What are some ways the holiness of our bodies is nurtured or affirmed in your context? What are some ways it is challenged or denied?

How does the story of Jesus' resurrection offer resistance and hope in a context where people's bodies are neglected, misused, or abused?

If all of life is a potluck, what are some offerings you bring to the table? What do you come hoping to find from others? From God?

Endnotes

- (1) Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*. Little, Brown Spark: New York. 2022.
- (2) Richard Swanson, “A Provocation: Third Sunday of Easter, John 21:1-19,” at *Provoking the Gospel*, <https://provokingthegospel.wordpress.com/?s=john+21>.

NOTES



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