

You may have already realized that we are doing something different today! You may have already felt like you have stepped outside of your comfort zone. You may have squirmed or wondered what we were doing as we moved to the chant and repeated it many times.... And did movements to the Lord's prayer. We chant to allow the words to fall from our heads to the heart... into our very bodies.

Well, this week, as part of our prayer series, we are exploring and experiencing embodied prayer. God gave us these bodies, molded them from the earth, breathed life into them, told us they are our temple. But most often, unless something goes wrong, we tend to not pay too much attention to them. How often do you give thanks for the miracle of how everything in your body works in unison to keep you alive and moving? How often do you think about how your heart works to move the blood and oxygen around your whole body, even to the very tips of your toes? How often do you think about all that goes in to you standing up.... The balance, the muscle groups, the breath, the brain telling your body what to do.... So much of our body is forgotten. And this is a good thing for we would be overwhelmed if we had to know and think how all of it worked. But it has also served to separate us from the physicality of who we are and how the Divine lives in us and moves us to help one another.

The scripture today from the Song of Solomon addresses some of this.

This book of the Bible is a very embodied one.... So much so that I am surprised and grateful that it made it in to the Bible! Some think it is a love story of two people, but it can also be seen as a love story between God and us. The very first verses are:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine,
 your anointing oils are fragrant,
your name is perfume poured out;

The sensual, embodied nature of this book set from the very first words.

Rabbi Shefa Gold translated the Song of Solomon in a much more embodied way. This is how she translated the passage we heard today:

The voice of my beloved: Here it comes!
Leaping over the mountains, skipping across the hills.
My love is like a gazelle, a wild stag
My love stands there on the other side of our wall, gazing
Through the windows, peering through the lattice.

My beloved calls to me:
Arise my friend, oh beautiful one,
Go to yourself...

For now the winter is past,
The rains are over and gone,
Blossoms appear in the fields,
The time for singing has come.
The sound of the turtledove
Echoes throughout the land.

The fig tree is ripening
Its new green fruit,

And the budded vines give of their fragrance,
Arise my friend, oh beautiful one,
Go to yourself...

The way she changes this refrain from 'Arise my love, my fair one, and come away', to 'arise my friend, oh beautiful one, go to yourself' is striking to me as it requires us to come into our bodies... it's not a going away not about a coming to someone else, but a coming into.... An invitation to pay attention to what is happening within as we hear the voice of the beloved, as we watch the fig tree ripen, as we smell the fragrance of the budded vines. What is happening inside us as all this unfolds? What sensations are arising? How is the Divine touching us, awakening us, coming in to us as our beloved comes leaping toward us!

These are not uncommon ways of describing the presence of God, but what is more uncommon is asking us to pay attention to what is happening in our bodies as God reveals God self to us. To explore the sensual nature of sitting in God's love. Many of the medieval mystics had these sensual experiences of God. Such as Mechthild of Magdeburg who said, Lord, you are my lover, my longing, my flowing stream, my sun, and I am your reflection.

And Hildegard of Bingen who said, The soul is kissed by God in its innermost regions.

Indeed, at times when I pray I feel the physical presence of God.... Not in a sensual way like some of these saints that have gone before, but in a way that often feels like a warm, gentle touch on my cheek or, if I am trying to fall asleep, on my back. It's just as if another is laying a hand on me to reassure me that they are there. Mostly it feels very mothering.... Like Mother Mary is with me, and it always comes with a sense of deep peace.... And sometimes tears!

But somewhere along the line, the people in power decided that our physical bodies are bad.... They declared we are born from acts of sin and our bodies continue to be sinful from that point onwards. Then many of us began to stop laboring with our bodies as we moved into houses, added water and machines to help us, and started to buy our food from the stores. And the result is that many of us are really disconnected from our bodies, our sensations, our physical-ness. We have moved from seeing them as temples, as fearfully and wonderfully made, as breathed in to by the very breath of God to being machines that can, mostly, be fixed if something minor goes wrong.

But what if we begin to reclaim the embodiment of faith? What if we start to let our bodies express praise? What if we use our whole bodies when we want to cry out in lament? What if we even, just for a while, pay attention to our flesh and bones and sinews and organs and senses? Not because

something is wrong, but simply because we have been gifted these physical bodies as our way of living in this world! And what a beautiful gift this is!

So, for a few minutes, let's pay attention to these beautiful, physical beings that we are!

As we begin, allow your gaze to soften, unfocused on what is around you.

You may want to close your eyes, but you don't have to.

As you are sitting pay attention to where your body is being supported by the pew. What parts are touching the wood? Where do you feel the pressure?

Feel your feet on the ground. Again, what parts of your foot are touching the ground? Can you flatten them out so more is touching?

Place a hand on your belly and one over your heart and just feel how your body is moving beneath them. Feel the warmth of your hands on these places they are touching. Apply more or less pressure and feel what amount of pressure feels right to you.

Pay attention to your breath. You don't need to change anything, just feel it flowing in and out, filling your lungs, bringing life to your body.

Imagine a light from God streaming down from above. Coming in through the crown of your head. Slowly filling your whole being with light. What color is the light? A gentle gold, a spring green, a pale pink? Choose the

color and watch as it fills you up. Are there areas where it is blocked from reaching? If so, see if you can intensify the stream to that place. See if you can fill yourself up with this light from the very crown of your head all the way into your feet and hands.

Sit in this space for a while. Allowing your whole body to be filled with light. As you slowly bring your awareness back to the room and the people around you, wiggle your toes and fingers and arms and legs and allow your eyes to open and focus on something. Then look around the room and meet the other physical bodies that are here with you today, making eye contact and acknowledging the other fearful and wonderfully made people, who were also knit together by God's hand who are here with you!

As you go through this week, I invite you to pray and pay attention to your physical being.... Not when it is hurting, for that is easy to do, but listen to those places where there is peace, freedom from pain. Look for the ways you are being touched in love. Place a hand on your heart or cheek and feel the warmth. Ask God to come to you and hold you. As you move through the world, pay attention to your body. Maybe pray the Lord's prayer with movements... if you can't remember the ones we did today, make up ones that feel right to you. Dance! Feel your body cooperating together as you walk. Remember you have a body! And see how God want to move with you in this Body! Arise my friend, oh beautiful one,

Go to yourself...

Pray and pay attention to this body you have been gifted for this lifetime!

Amen