

Are You Ready for the Beach?
Psalm 139:7-18; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
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Last winter, Dave and I had the great pleasure of taking a cruise to the warm Bahamas while New Hampshire was shivering in temperatures below zero. I am sorry I couldn't take you all with me. You know that I grew up in Texas, and I have not gotten used to New England winters, despite living here for nearly 20 years. So, having a break from the winter blast was a wonderful blessing for me.

But packing for that trip was a real challenge. I didn't have any beachy clothes to wear, at least not any that fit my winterized body. The radio and television and internet were full of commercials for Weight Watchers and Noom, all asking, don't you want to start dieting now so that you will have a summer body by the time summer arrives? But I didn't have that kind of time. We were sailing in just a couple of weeks. I had to take THIS body to the beach.

So, I went shopping. Luckily, my favorite store had a whole rack of summer clothes on sale since they were out of season. I selected an armful of them and bravely headed to the dressing room to try them on. There I stood under that glaring light, in front of that huge, unforgiving mirror, trying on one outfit after another. It was so discouraging. Worse, it left me feeling bad about myself just when I was ready to celebrate a wonderful trip with my beloved.

I imagine I am not the only one here who has had this experience. Do any of YOU actually enjoy trying on clothes in a fitting room? How do you feel when you have to try on a swim suit? Does it make you feel like celebrating? I imagine that most of you feel pretty much like I did that day. Facing that mirror, under that glaring light, is not a good experience. We see all our imagined flaws. All the ways that our bodies are not what they used to be or not what we wish they were. It hurts our feelings.

When in our lives does this begin? I think of little children running through the house half naked after their baths, so proud of their clean selves, giggling for all they are worth. When do we begin to be ashamed of the bodies that God has given us? What messages do we receive along the way that tell us that this body, the one that we are living in, is not good enough?

Can we reclaim that childlike sense of joy in our bodies, even as we get older? I remember my aging father, after HIS shower, proclaiming proudly, "I am now the cleanest boy in Parker County!" I want some of that!

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And so, we come to today's scripture about our bodies being temples of the Holy Spirit. This is Paul writing to the troublesome church in Corinth, and his narrow point in this passage is that we should not be sleeping with prostitutes, because that defiles our bodies, and we should be honoring God with our bodies, not defiling them. Okay. I can agree with that, not that I have ever been tempted to that particular sin. Over the years, I have heard lots of sermons on this passage, some focused on all sorts of sexual behaviors, more focused on the evils of alcohol and other drugs. And not one of those sermons felt like Good News because they were just naming all the ways that my body could be sinful or could be tempted to sin.

But I don't think that is God's message to us about our bodies. I think there is Good News for us in this passage. Remember that God created humankind, not from some beautiful, classic material like marble,

but from the dust of the earth. It was into a lump of clay that God blew breath, God's Spirit, endowing us all with living souls.

The psalmist got this message loud and clear. "I praise you," the psalmist writes. "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" Isn't that awesome? I wonder if he looked himself in the mirror before he wrote that, or if he only looked in the eyes of God and saw love there.

God chose to come to earth in a human body. Not a perfect body, but a human one. We see these classic pictures of Jesus, looking like he's been to the gym every day and then had a good shower. But I imagine Jesus was pretty dusty after walking from village to village. I imagine his feet and his hands were calloused. I imagine that his back hurt sometimes, and his feet ached. And when we look to the cross, we see that we are redeemed by a broken body. A tortured body. A body that could not take any more. God chose THIS body to come to us, a body like ours.

Paul writes, "Do 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."

How do we do that? How do we glorify God in these bodies that are imperfect? Bodies that don't feel quite ready for the beach. Maybe NEVER ready for the beach? How do we glorify God in our bodies?

Well, I think it is time for us to stand in front of a mirror – better yet, in front of a dressing room mirror – and say to ourselves, "Self, for whatever unfathomable reason, THIS is the body that God loves so much, that God has chosen as a temple for the Holy Spirit. This body. Imagine that! This body belongs to God. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Are you ready for the beach? Yes. You are ready right now. The bodies we have right now are beach bodies. So be at peace, and enjoy the summer, knowing that God delights in you.

Amen