

Our youngest, Will, has been on Spring Break this week, and our middle (Fiona) is home from college, Troy took a bit of time off work and so we all got to spend a few days together. We took a road trip to LA – because the kids and I have never been. We did a lot of driving – spent a lot of time together in the car, in traffic – and we all slept (or tried to sleep) in the same hotel room, it was tight quarters for a few days there, for sure.

In years gone by, we'd take trips like this, but our family of five took up a lot less room when the kids were little. This trip was very different from those days. A road trip with two near-full-grown kids and two more-than-full-grown adults will remind you, very quickly, of your own embodiment. All that time together, bodies and personalities bumping into each other, all the physical and emotional stuff to navigate, the sounds – the smells - the laughs, the occasional tensions, all of it will remind you only too quickly of the fact that we are our bodies, that the world around us impacts our bodies, that our thinking and feeling, our emotional states, our moods, all of it is a product of our embodied experience of being alive.

Hunger and tiredness, excitement, stress, enthusiasm, muscles and joints - all of it affects our thinking, and how we are with one another. Our embodiment is who and what we are. It's unavoidable and inescapable.

One of the things I've always found most compelling about the Christian Way, as I interpret it, is its emphasis on the physical body: Jesus' story begins at birth, he must be cared for and nurtured to grow from infant, to toddler, to teenager.

As an adult, Jesus' story, as we've received it, continues on with eating and drinking, time spent alone in prayer, there's physical touch, anointing, foot washing, and the horrific pain of the violence inflicted on him, with Jesus' beating, wounding, and execution on the cross. All of it physical, drawing attention to the physical, emphasizing and lifting up the very real, unavoidable, and inescapable physical reality of us all. We are bodies.

And so it all gets a bit tricky with the Resurrection stories. Why do Jesus' closest friends not recognize him? Despite being able to see him, they apparently only come to know him when they hear his words, or when they eat together, or, in the case of Thomas, only after seeing Jesus' terrible wounds, the physical wounds, on his very physical ... resurrected body? It's an unanswerable question, really, and it's a stumbling block to belief for many.

And there's a lot at stake in our response to the Resurrection.

One way to respond to this extraordinary event is to interpret these stories, Jesus' interactions after being raised, as allegory. That is, that the narratives we read in the Gospel texts are intended to be symbolic, not actual; scenes and dialogue, created to point to a truth, but not intended to be a telling of what actually, really happened.

An allegorical reading can have us spiritualize the Resurrection, have us see ourselves as a spirit or soul temporarily 'housed' in a physical body, have us believe that it is the spiritual which is eternal, the spiritual, that which we become after death, that's 'most important.' And this can have us devalue our present material reality, our embodied lives, as we look toward a time after death,

a time in the future, when we can shed this cumbersome and all too often uncomfortable physical reality for what's really 'real' and will undoubtedly be better, we just have to hang on for that.

This kind of thinking can have a catastrophic effect on the way we think about our physical, material world. We can come to accept or normalize our exploitation of the planet, and people, the massive disparities in quality of life experienced across our country and the planet, and the horrific and ongoing use of violence.

If our physical reality is just a stop-gap, and better times are coming when we finally escape it, our task is to be as comfortable as we can to make it to that point, bide our time, tolerate or suffer this world, mindful of that future promise.

But, if we take the Resurrection stories seriously, not allegorically, but interpret them seriously, as retellings of events that so significantly impacted those who witnessed them that they shared their stories, what they saw and heard and felt. And then these shared versions of these stories were passed around and they survived, because these mysterious stories had the power to transform lives lived. These stories were shared and retold until eventually they were written down by the writers of our Gospel texts ... if we take these stories seriously, we can't help but notice the importance of the physical.

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

Jesus wants Thomas to know that he is a body, a body changed, but a physical body nonetheless. This all, we – are God's Creation and this physical world matters.

To take the Resurrection seriously is to take embodiment seriously, it's to believe that this physical material world is important. All of it is of and from God, and it is, in its essence, good. And this way of thinking about the Resurrection calls us to notice how so much of our physical reality is undervalued, exploited, neglected, and mistreated. And that it's largely human decision-making, the human-created systems and structures of the world that's responsible.

As followers of Jesus, I truly believe we're called to value the physical, to value bodies and our embodiment, and to be healers; to transform our own lives through our trust in Jesus' Way, and the revealed truth of eternal life, the very hard-to-understand promise of eternal embodied life.

This isn't about our health in the conventional sense, whether we're free of illness or disability, this is about healing of woundedness. Healing our own wounds and playing a role in the healing of others.

Jesus' crucifixion is for us an icon of what humans, what we, are capable of unhealed, in an unhealed world.

We're to be healers and be healed of past traumas that are held by the body, including the inherited traumas and wounds of our ancestors, some inflicted some received. Healers of the wounds, pain, and suffering still being felt by bodies that are devalued by this world. As followers of Jesus we're to do our part to heal this physical reality so that, at some point, all of Creation might be restored and brought into full Communion with God.

We are bodies and being embodied and living together is hard, it's hard with the ones we love, so much harder with the ones we don't; yet healing our pain and our traumas around that is our work.

The Christian story and the Christian Way flows from the Creation story: God created human beings in God's own image, and Genesis tells us that we, and all of Creation, were deemed good.

Jesus' Resurrection has the power to call us out of despair, out of fear, out of inertia and inspire us to do the healing work we have been given to do in this life, in our own lives and in the world, to live the life we profess by our faith, and live it fully. To do it confidently, together, and to make a difference to this world in our short time here. Amen.