

Embodied prayer – expression, surrender, joy

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David ALFARO SIQUEIROS (1896-1974)
Mexican Suite: Village Dance, 1968

To ponder...

In your life has there ever been a time where words have become difficult, distant or inadequate in your spiritual life?



“In a world desperate to make an enemy of my body, how will I befriend it?”

This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley, 64



How do I arrive in this space?

anticipation

awkwardness

creative

asking

offering

hoping

inviting



The shape of our evening

- Some thoughts on embodiment and prayer/ the spiritual life
- exploring gesture and prayer
- communicating with our bodies with others
- reflecting

Three movements as movers : expression, surrender, joy

- closing reflections
- Final benediction (embodied)





“When we pray, our posture and our bodily position can be an important aspect of our communication with God. To settle into a relaxed and comfortable position, letting go, allowing a chair to fully support your body, breathing deeply in a way that releases tension, can be a very tangible way of telling God we are bringing our whole self into his presence – body mind and spirit. With our body we are telling God that we trust him and rest in him and are available to him.”

Sacred Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton 87



“We are in need of a sacramental approach to life, in which the body is understood to be sacred because it is the place where God’s Spirit has chosen to dwell. Given this, all aspects of life in the body have the potential to become places where we meet and know God in unique ways.”

Sacred Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton 81



Senses are the ways in which we are offered the merest whisper, a transvaluation, of the vision of the Deity, a "miserably inadequate… [yet] perfect" pointer to that "of which we have here no faintest guess."

C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 278.



“Our bodies are prophets. They know when things are out of whack and they say so, although most of us welcome their news about as warmly as the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jeremiah’s. We would rather lock up our bodies than listen to what they have to say. Where Christians are concerned, this leaves us in the peculiar position of being followers of the Word Made Flesh who neglect our own flesh – or worse – who treat our bodies with shame and scorn.”

An Altar in the World, Barbara Brown Taylor 41



“Most times, our body is the first to know if we are overcommitted, stressed, uneasy or joyful and when we need to attend to something that is causing us pain or disease.”

Sacred Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton 85

In what way/s does this ring true for you or those you work with?



Body Shame – KJ Ramsey

“Shame wants us to live divided, dishonest, disembodied lives, to treat our bodies and stories like failures to conceal, to let our lips say we believe God is good while our hearts stay discouraged in the dark. The most harrowing power of shame might be its stealth in convincing us that silencing our pain behind statements of God’s goodness is spiritual, when really it’s just a churchy form of self-sufficiency.”

This Too Shall Last: Finding Grace When Suffering Lingers



“What if self-sufficiency was always a bankrupt lie, and suffering simply demonstrates its poverty? What if suffering isn’t ruining our selves but re-creating them? Suffering is an invitation to live and tell the story truer and more satisfying than pain-free ease. It is an invitation to know and be known by the God who entered the human story intent on transforming death into life. The presence of prolonged suffering begs us to remember our true story and its suffering Lord.”

This Too Shall Last: Finding Grace When Suffering Lingers





“The story of God becoming body is only matched by God’s submissions to the body of a woman. That the creator of the cosmos would choose to rely on an embodied creation. To be grown, fed, delivered – God put faith in a body. In Mary’s muscles and hormones, bowels and breasts. And when Christ’s body is broken and blood shed, we should hold in mystery that first a woman’s body was broken, her blood shed, in order to deliver the hope of the world into the world.”

This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley, 57

“Our tales of Christian escapism lead us to the place where the physical is damned and the immaterial is gloried. Where the only holy things are invisible. How could you expect me to believe this when I’ve met a God who drank from the breast of his creation.”

This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley, 58

Christ and Mary – Scott Erickson

“We are a people whose flesh grows back. It does not die quietly. We must remember this, even in the most painful conditions of our healing.”

This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley, 145



“The daily practice of incarnation – of being in the body with full confidence that God speaks the language of flesh – is to discover a pedagogy that is as old as the gospels. Why else did Jesus spend his last night on earth teaching his disciples to wash feet and share supper? With all the conceptual truths in the universe at his disposal, he did not give them something to think about when he was gone. Instead, he gave them concrete things to do – specific ways of being together in their bodies – that would go on teaching them what they needed to know when he was no longer around to teach them himself.”

An Altar in the World, Barbara Brown Taylor 43



How might welcoming the body into spiritual direction enhance and broaden the experience for our directees?



“When words become inadequate to express our joy and praise, we pray with our body by lifting our hands or moving or dancing.”

Sacred Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton 87

“The incarnation itself – Christ’s choice to take on flesh and inhabit a human body – forever elevates the experience of embodiment to the heights of spiritual significance.”

Sacred Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton 81



Holding

But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
Ps 131:2



Lying down

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you.
Ps 139:15-18



Standing

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Luke 12: 6-7

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Joshua 1:5



Kneeling

Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Ps 95:6-7



Curled tight

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:24



Lying prostrate-face down

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.

Genesis 2:7



Standing arms open in receiving.

Sing for joy, you heavens, for the Lord has done this;
shout aloud, you earth beneath.
Burst into song, you mountains,
you forests and all your trees,
for the Lord has redeemed Jacob,
he displays his glory in Israel.
Isaiah 44:23



Stretching in every/ any direction – growth

Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,
strengthen your stakes.
For you will spread out to the right and to the left;
Isaiah 54:2-3



Leaping - joy

The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy,
and with my song I praise him. Psalm 28:7

Listen! My beloved!
Look! Here he comes,
leaping across the mountains,
bounding over the hills. Song of Songs 2:8



Swaying – flexibility

You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Psalm 139: 3



Being held

Even to your old age and grey hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.
Isaiah 46: 4



The goal is to have 3 gestures and to move gently between these, hold the gesture, and then move to the other.

- The valley of dry bones. *Can these bones live? Ezekiel 37:3*
- Jesus weeps outside the tomb of Lazarus. *I am the resurrection and the life. John 11:25*
- Elijah weeps under the broom tree. *The journey is too much for you. 1 Kings 19:7*
- God speaks to Elijah in the silence. *What are you doing here Elijah? 1 Kings 19:13*
- Jesus raises a dead child. *Talitha koum. (Little girl get up). Mark 5:41*
- Mary Magdalene recognises Jesus in the garden. *Rabboni John 20:16*
- Jesus makes breakfast for his friends. *Do you love me Peter? John 21: 17*
- A woman touches Jesus' garment. *Daughter, your faith has healed you. Mark 5:34*
- Nathan confronts David. *Behold you are the man. 2 Samuel 12:7*
- Elizabeth greets Mary. *The child in my womb leapt within me. Luke 1:44*



“The body knows – not just the individual body, but the cathedral we make when we bend our bodies together over one as good as dead. Doing that, we act out the one thing we know for sure: it is God’s will that these bones live.”

An Altar in the World, Barbara Brown Taylor 51



You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.



You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.



You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.



Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.



You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.



Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.



Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?



If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.



If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.



If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”



even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.



For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.



I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.



My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.



Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book

before one of them came to be.



How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!



Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.



...

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.



See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.



Humble and gentle God, / You are rest for my soul. (From Matt 11:28-30)

You are our refuge, / And our strength. (From Ps 46:1)

Both day and night, / I Belong to You. (From Ps 74:16)

Your grace, O Lord, / Is enough for me. (From 2 Cor 12:9)

There is no fear, / In Your arms of love. (From 1 John)

Adapted from Sarah Bessey's breath prayers



Small group kōrero

- What thinking about embodiment has been new for you in this session?
- Is there anything you could take from this into the work you do?
- Do you use types of embodiment in your practice?



Whole Group Kōrero

- Do you have any questions for me?

- What have you noticed about your disposition towards embodiment in this way and what reflections do you have to offer the group?



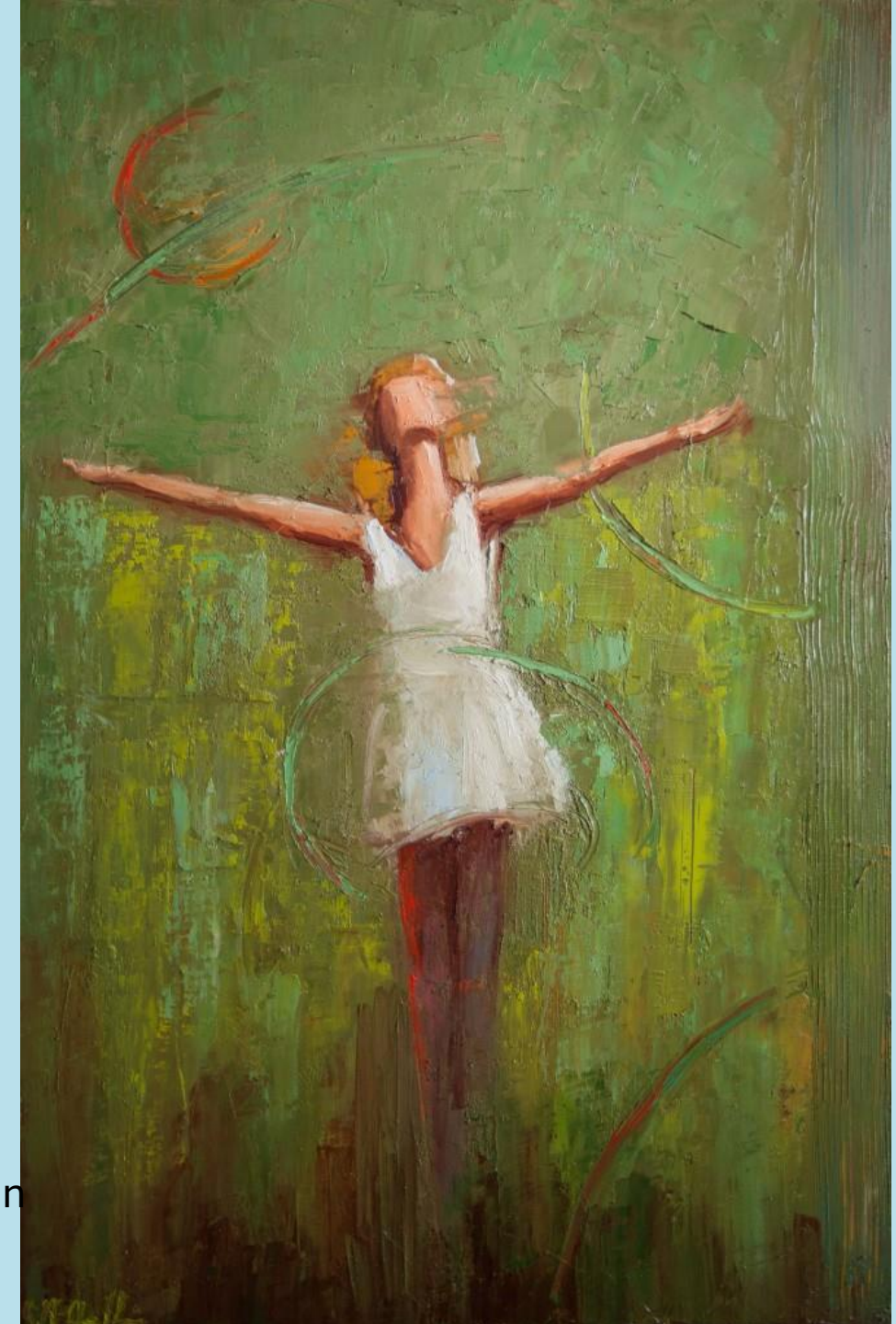


2 Sam 6: 21-22

David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord’s people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.



JOY



Pure Joy by Shelby McQuilkin

Joyfully, joyfully
We are going up
To dedicate our hearts
To the Lord

Joyfully, joyfully
We are going up
We come into His presence
With joy

God has said He'd dwell
In the praises of His people
He is seeking those who'll
Worship Him in spirit and in truth

With our hands lifted up
And our mouths filled with praise
With singing and dancing
And joy we celebrate

Hallelujah, hallelujah
We enter His presence with joy, joy, joy
Hallelujah, hallelujah
We dedicate our hearts
To the Lord

“We cannot get free disembodied. There is no promised land without a tongue to taste the milk and honey. We may forsake the body in order to survive, but the truth is we do so at our peril.

Bessel van der Kolk also writes:

‘Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies. Being frightened means that you live in a body that is always on guard…. People need to become aware of their sensations and the way their bodies interact with the world around them. Physical self-awareness is the first step to releasing the tyranny of the past.’

In a world desperate to make an enemy of my body, how will I befriend it?”

This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley, 64



God give us courage to see our bodies – their limitations, their miraculous intricacies, their pain, their loveliness, their weakness, their aging – as a gift from you. How incredible our bodies can taste, see, hear, cry, laugh, bend, kneel and rest. How amazing to come to you the maker of all bodies and to hear you say, it is very good, about us.

As we partner with others and their bodies give us wisdom to hear the things that the body is saying but the mouth is not.

Help us to attend with honour to the stories our bodies tell and want to tell.

Help us God to name and move beyond our discomforts with embodiment and embodied prayer.

As we finish we open our hands, we position our heads in a way that seems fitting to communicate our need and desire to you, we stand, sit, knee or lie in your sacred presence.

We remember Jesus that you came in flesh and in your body healed, embraced, wept, stumbled, danced, sang, laughed.

Help us God where we have failed to honour the whole of our human experience and in doing so to realise the great delight you have in our minds, our emotions, and our bodies.

Give us God new awe for all our bodies can do and new acceptance for their limitations. Help us in all things to bring those we journey with towards freedom and to make space for their embodied praying with joy and generosity.

Strengthen us Holy Spirit for the work, fill us with wonder Creator, remind us Jesus of your embodiment. For you God and in your name are all things, including our bodies. Amen