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Luke 6:12-19

Isaiah 52:7-10

Captivated by Beauty: From Beauty to Compassion and Justice

August 4, 2024

Our Old Testament Lesson comes from the prophet Isaiah and is most often read on Christmas as we celebrate the birth of the christ child, the Prince of Peace. This is not a quiet message of peace. Listen now to the word of God from Isaiah 52:7-10 (Common English Bible)

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of a messenger
who proclaims peace,
who brings good news,
who proclaims salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God rules!"

⁸ Listen! Your lookouts lift their voice;
they sing out together!
Right before their eyes they see the LORD returning to Zion.

⁹ Break into song together, you ruins of Jerusalem!
The LORD has comforted his people and has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm in view of all the nations;
all the ends of the earth have seen our God's victory.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

This is a noisy, fleshy passage. Appropriate to celebrate the incarnation of God through the baby Jesus. It reminds us of the celebratory nature of Christmas, and may seem a bit odd to be reading in August - we can't even claim Christmas in July! It may also seem a bit odd after spending so much time this summer in quiet contemplation. It does, however, fit very well with the olympics!

I wonder how many of you have been watching the olympics. Show of hands? I love it - the team work, the healthy competition, the celebration of what our bodies are capable of. Have you noticed that nearly every athlete has some pattern they follow as they approach their sport? Swimmers shake their arms, runners stretch their legs, gymnasts take deep breaths, and they all take a moment to center themselves - alone - before they engage their bodies for whatever activity lies ahead.

Wendy Farley, the author of *Beguiled by Beauty*, the book on which our summer sermon series has been based, makes the claim that we engage in personal and contemplative practices so that we might better be present in the world. Recognizing the beauty in nature and one another calls us to mourn the ways all of creation is harmed, from the land to the people. Recognizing beauty compels us toward others. It urges us to work for God's justice and compassion in the world. Tending to our relationship with God is not just for our own personal good, but for the good of the world. We see this in the reading from Luke that Deb read. Jesus, in this passage and many others, goes off to be with God. When he is done praying, Jesus gets to work - not just by praying for others, but by walking and meeting people: being in his body in the world.

So often we forget our bodies are God's instruments. It is easier for us to focus on the divinity of Jesus rather than his body. And yet we recognize his body as he is dying, and celebrate his body in communion. And so, our practice this morning is to pray with our bodies. To recognize that our bodies are beautiful and can be used for glorifying God - just as our words and silence can be. And we can even do this in worship!

I am going to read the text again, and provide motions to go with it. I'll walk you through the motions and guide you the first time through the passage, then you can follow me through the passage together 2 more times. It is ok if you cannot do all of the motions, but I encourage you to do as many as you can. Please stand if you are able.

How beautiful upon the mountains	hands above head in a triangle
are the feet of a messenger	begin marching and don't stop
who proclaims peace,	hands around mouth like shouting then raise the peace sign
who brings good news,	wave in
who proclaims salvation,	make sign of cross with arms
who says to Zion, "Your God rules!"	shout YOUR GOD RULES while raising arm
	(Stop marching)

⁸ Listen! Your lookouts lift their voice;	hands around ear
they sing out together!	Both Hands from mouth and extend out
Right before their eyes they see the LORD returning to Zion.	hands over eyes like a lookout

⁹ Break into song together, you ruins of Jerusalem! **Both Hands from mouth and extend out**

The LORD has comforted his people **Hug self**

and has redeemed Jerusalem. **make cross with arms**

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm in view of all the nations; **extend arms with muscles**

all the ends of the earth **Rounded earth with arms**

have seen our God's victory. **Arms raised in a V**

Amen.

Recognizing our own bodies moves us to acknowledge the bodies of others - moves us from contemplation to compassion and justice. This spiritual practice opens us to work for justice in the world by recognizing the ways bodies are overlooked, put down, discriminated against. It opens us to the needs of the body for clean water, food and safe shelter. It opens us to challenge the ways other bodies are seen as less than, for the color of their skin, their shape and size, for the ways they are dis-abled, for their relationships to other bodies. Jesus calls us to love one another, and his example is to encounter the bodies of strangers and share this good news.

This morning when we take communion, Will and Claire will be holding baskets of granola bars. You are invited to take one, to keep it in your car, and give it to someone holding a sign at a stop light or along the streets of our - a body in need of recognition and of nourishment.

Let us pray.

Holy one, who meets us in body and in spirit, we give you thanks for the ways we have to encounter you - in word, in silence, in art, in music, and in our bodies. Remind us to spend time with you, to contemplate your beauty, and move us to seek your justice in the world. Amen.