

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 24, 2019

Preached by the Rev. Lisa M. Erdeljon
St Michael's Episcopal Church, Barrington, IL

Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

“O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water.”

In *The Republic*, Plato presents an allegory of the Cave. *The Republic*, written by the Classical Greek Philosopher Plato around 380 BC, has become one of the world's most influential works of philosophy and political theory, as well as a leading way to believe in God and abstract objects that cannot be perceived but can be intelligible. (That's relevant)

Back to the Allegory of the Cave, though...

Imagine that there are people chained to the inside of a cave. They cannot turn around, they cannot move more than just their faces and eyes. They are forced to stare only at the back wall of the cave.

Behind them is a fire, which casts light on that wall.

Whenever anything comes between the fire and the prisoners, it casts shadows upon the wall. As these shadows happen more often, the prisoners begin to create names of these things. Objects that seem almost real but are actually just shadows on a cave wall.

These shadows become the prisoners' reality.

In the story, one prisoner is freed. Upon turning around, he suddenly sees the real objects, and suddenly knows what is truly real.

No longer is his only perception of the world based on shadows poorly casted upon a wall.

Instead, he now knows the truth. The reality. The embodied actuality of the objects.

Plato refers to this freed prisoner as “the philosopher”—the one to whom the truth is revealed.

I would call him “the true believer”—the one to whom the truth is revealed. The one who knows the truth.

The truth that all things require not just the shadowy reflection of existence—the essence of its being—but also the actual object—the reality of its being.

That even you and me are not just shadowy reflections of our souls or our spirits or the shadows of what or who we are.

You and me? We are also the very embodied, actualized, objects of human beings.

We have both a soul and a body. We have both the metaphysical and the physical—the perceived and the actual.

But sorry, I stand corrected. It is not that we **have** both a physical body and a metaphysical soul. It is that we **are** both a physical body and a metaphysical soul.

We **are** both the actualized object and the abstract projection of its essence.

In other words, we are both the object—the body—and the shadow—the soul.

We can't be just one.

...

In today's opening prayer—the Collect of the Day—we called out to God for both our body and our soul.

If you remember the words we prayed, we asked for God to “keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls.”

To be with us as we defend against “all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul.”

We prayed for Divine protection (and perhaps even intervention) of both our bodies and our souls—our object-ness and our internal-ness. The physical and the metaphysical.

Because we know that we are both a body and a soul. And that both can be attacked. Both can be harmed...

Both can harm...

And both can celebrate! Or long for or need or desire or even believe...

Which is what we see in today's Psalm.

Today's Psalm is about an individual longing for God on all levels of being and doing.

“O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you...”

“My soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you...”

Both my physical being and my metaphysical existence long for God.

God created both our bodies and our souls.

If we go back to the second story of Creation, in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, we can read how God created Adam:

“The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being”

God created the body from the dust of the ground and the soul from God’s breath.

By the way, side note real quick, the Latin word *spiritus*, which is where we get the word *spirit*—it also means *breath*. Like the Hebrew word *ruach*, which means *the breath of God*.

And both our bodies and our souls are good. Because if only good can come from a good God, and God created both our bodies and our souls, then both must be good.

But, consequentially, both can also be corrupted.

Because we are human, and our very nature, from that second story of Creation, when Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge, our very nature leads to corruption. To sin.

And no, I don’t mean we want to be corrupted. I don’t mean we seek out sin or seek out disobedience from God. Or distance from God.

What I mean is that we are sinful beings. The very nature of being human means we are sinful.

And that sin—the sinfulness within us—it is in both our bodies and our souls.

It is not one or the other. It must be both!

...

Going back to Plato and his writings and teachings... This is where we differ. This is where Christianity and the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob differ from Classical Greek philosophy.

This is where we, as Christians, differ from one of the main streams of thought in modern day society.

We are both body and soul. One is not perverted or evil or broken or sinful any more than the other.

We cannot exist without both. You. And me. We exist because we are both a body and a soul.

In fact, the very nature of what we believe, the very nature of our salvation is within the body.

The embodied.

The incarnate.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, who was made man, just like you and me.

In Greek philosophy, the goal was to overcome the body. The idea was that the body was gross or sick or embarrassing.

But in our faith, in Christianity, it is the body that saves us just as much as the soul.

The Word becoming Flesh!

God taking on the object reality of the embodied human being.

And we get to live into that! Into the embodied-ness of being human.

As well as the spirited-ness of being human.

And the Psalm dives into that—the joint being of both body and soul.

And if we look at it again, beyond just the opening lines,

Yes, “my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you,”

But throughout the whole Psalm, we see a desire, a longing, a needing of God for our embodied realities and our ensouled perceptions.

We see a spiritual and physical devotion that our own Lenten disciplines seek to cultivate, and yet so often fall short of.

We see the type of longing for God like we long for that first cup of coffee in the morning.

We see the type of needing God, wanting God, craving God, that reminds us of that one more piece of chocolate cake or that one more inch larger of a tv screen or that one more hit of the snooze button.

The way we live our lives with needing and wanting and craving all the things—all the objects—around us.

...

What, though, I must ask, would it be like for each of us to live with those same kinds of cravings, but for God?

What if, just as some of us claim to not be able to function without that morning cup of coffee...
What if we claimed just as much to not function without that presence of God?

Now, I suspect, if you are anything like me, you're probably thinking, “But I do crave God. That's why I'm here, on Sunday morning, instead of relaxing with a cup of coffee at home.”

But I wonder if you crave God in that same way.

In the bodily manner that we **crave** the things, the objects, that surround us in this world, in this reality, in this physical existence.

Because yes, it is easy to say “My soul thirsts for you,” but how hard is it to say, “My flesh faints for you”?

It is easy to imagine the metaphysical longing of a soul that desperately seeks its home in that Heavenly Kingdom we are all promised.

But how hard is it to also imagine the physical, embodied longing of us—you, me, this body—that also desperately seeks its home in that Heavenly Kingdom we are all promised?

Because, as we believe, as Christians believe, we are waiting for a Bodily Resurrection! A physical reunification with God and all Creation!

Not just a spiritual... not just an en-soul-ed reunification...

But an actual, physical, embodied, reunification with God and all Creation!

And the good news? The best news?

As we seek both in body and soul, the God of all Goodness and Creation—that God is already here, with us, in us, around us, holding us in God’s tender love like the outstretched hand of a mother.

An outstretched hand that seeks to break the chains that bind us and free us—body and soul—from the sin of this world—as we reunite with God and all creation a reality, both physical and metaphysical, that exceeds all knowledge and comprehension we have of the already known physical and metaphysical.

As if we were those prisoners chained in that cave and God seeks to unbind us and allow us to turn around and know the absolute truth.

To know and to feel. To be and to do. To exist in both body and soul—an embodied and an en-soul-ed human being.

In that Collect of the Day, we prayed for the Divine protection (and perhaps even intervention) of both our embodied beings and our internal souls.

Because we know, as the Collect points out, we are both bodies and souls. As human beings, we do not have just one aspect—we have both—the physical body and the metaphysical soul.

As God’s creation, we do not have just one aspect—we have both.

As followers of Christ, we do not have just one aspect—we have both.

And so, when Jesus commands us to repent in today’s Gospel reading, or when Paul describes all the wrongs that the Israelites did in the desert, or even when Moses removes his shoes to stand on holy ground...

They are telling us that sin and repentance; love and forgiveness; worship, prayer, and praise—it must all happen in both the body and the soul.

We must repent from both the body and the soul.

We must not commit wrongs of the body or the soul.

We must remember that even on the side of a mountain, we could still be standing, in our bodies, on holy ground.

And when God is here, with us, in our embodied and spirit-filled existence, then we will truly know that same type of satisfaction that the Psalmist knows, that Moses knows, that Paul knows, that Jesus knows...

That same type of truth that God seeks to reveal to us, in both our bodies and our souls.

That God—physical, incarnate, and metaphysical, eternal—God is present and will be present and has been present in all, to all, and with all.

We just have to open our eyes, and our hearts, to see and to know.

Amen.