1 Corinthians 12:13-20, 25-27

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.
Good morning! Most of you know that I am a nurse, so it may not surprise you that I have chosen to talk about bodies and embodiment. From the time I was very young [please, no comments about how long ago that must have been]—but as long as I can remember, the human body has fascinated me as an amazing and wonderful creation. I wondered what made my hair grow—and my toenails—and later how our bodies know to produce only enough growth hormone to make most of us reach an adult height—no more and no less. I wondered, how is it that our muscles and bones—and even our hearts--respond to exercise in a way that continuously increases our capacity to do more—even to rise to the level of the Olympic champions many of us have been watching these past few weeks? And how amazing that we can ingest a boat load of carbs, and our bodies produce the right amount of insulin to keep our blood sugars reasonably stable—that we don’t simply collapse into a pile of sweet sticky goo.

As I grew older, went to college, claimed a future career in health care, I came to appreciate both how fragile our bodies [life] can be but also how resilient. First, of resilience: our physical bodies can take a great deal of abuse and still recover. I have been humbled by humans’ abilities to survive devastating injury—perhaps breaking most of the bones in their body--severe illness such as meningitis, pneumonia, a heart attack, a stroke, or cancer--and psychological trauma such as imprisonment, major loss, depression, and nearly unbearable grief. At the same time, I have witnessed the fragile nature of human existence—as I know many of you have also.
I have been present for both the first and last breath of my patients and members of my own family—the first breath of my children, amazingly boisterous and beautiful; the last labored breath of my mother as I whispered my love for her and my permission for her to leave us. Life as we know it is both fragile and resilient.

In my journey of discovery about health and the human body, I have developed an understanding of our bodies as the containers and the vehicles for navigating this world and living out our lives. Think about what that means to you. Your body presents you to the world, reflects who you are; it’s an important part of the pattern that helps people recognize you and distinguish you from someone else. For most of us, most of the time, we take our bodies pretty much for granted. They become invisible until they fail us in some way. That’s when we become aware of them—when they sabotage our carefree way of getting around in the world. Of course, having said that, I have also observed that there are aspects of our bodily selves that may get more attention than they deserve—for some of us it’s our hair, our makeup, our weight, the clothing with which we disguise [and disclose] our bodies. That may be a conversation for another day; but for the most part we do take for granted that our bodies will do what they need to do to get us up and going, to be on time for class, to heal a minor scratch or injury, to survive occasionally on little or no sleep…we don’t really ask permission of our bodies; they just do what they need to do.
But as I mentioned, there are times that our bodies come into the foreground, demanding our attention. As any of you who have experienced severe pain, for example, will understand, pain can make it virtually impossible to comprehend anything else. After an orthopedic surgery some years ago, [when, as I remember, I rated my pain a 12 on a 0 to 10 scale.]-I felt as though I simply couldn’t see around the pain.” And when an unusual lump somewhere or a functional failure stops us in our tracks, our bodies suddenly become the focus of our attention. As one of the participants in my research with people experiencing advanced HIV disease and AIDS revealed, “sometimes I feel as though I have become my body—tuning in to every heartbeat, every discomfort, every minor change—listening and watching—waiting for the other shoe to drop.” (in other words waiting for signs of AIDS and impending death). So in those circumstances, our physical selves, our bodies, take center stage—they are absolutely in our faces—so to speak!

I have gradually come to believe that the connectedness of one’s mind, body and spirit as one undivided whole and the even broader connectedness we have to our God and to each other is essential to our humanness. In fact, I have come to believe that healing and wholeness are one and the same. Healing, you see, is not the same as being cured or being free from disease or imperfection. Healing may even occur in the face of dying. I believe healing is coming to know and understand our connectedness—within ourselves, with each other, and with our God.
So what’s my point? Our bodies do matter—not just as manifestations of our physical being but of our undivided wholeness. Sally McFague has asserted this same argument in her book, *The Body of God*, that bodies do matter—including the body of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Even more broadly, McFague describes the very universe as an incarnation of the body of God. “We all exist together in one space within the nurturing matrix of God’s body.” As humans, says McFague, we are all made of the ashes of dead stars; thus we are relatively insignificant but at the same time critically important in the sense of not being the goal of creation but as caretakers of our planet and each other. She then challenges us to develop an attitude of humility rather than control.

Margaret Wheatley, author of *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, describes her perception of the world in which we live today:

> Here is the real world as I experience it. It is a world where small groups of enraged people alter the politics of the most powerful nations on earth. It is a world where very slight changes in the temperature of oceans cause violent weather that brings great hardship to people living far from those oceans. It is a world where pandemics kill tens of millions and viruses leap carelessly across national boundaries. It is a world of increased fragmentation where people retreat into positions and identities. It is a world where we have very different interpretations of what’s going on, even though we look at the same information. It is a world of constant surprise, where we never know what we’ll hear when we turn on the news. It is a world where change is just the way it is.
It is in this context that we are called to embody—with all of our beings—those things that we value. We are called to act in keeping with those values. How do we live in and think about our bodies in this kind of world? McFague attests that in our Western culture we have come to believe that anything can be fixed or replaced [including knees, hips, kidneys, livers, hearts, lungs—the list goes on], so specific elements of our bodies are not important. But if, in a holographic notion of humanity God is available to us in bodies—yours, mine, everyone’s-- then bodies are special and even sacred. The Divine becomes part of the everyday, part of the pain and pleasure of bodily existence. Body is not a discardable garment cloaking the real self; it is at least an integral part of the main attraction--Body as the home of everything we value.

It is in this broader sense of embodiment that I have come to a place of extreme humility in being a nurse. Nurses are privileged to bear witness to the health and illness of individuals, families, and communities—often at the most vulnerable times in their lives. We get to be there when life begins and ends, we get to provide comfort, help people find hope, live with them in their uncertainty, and accompany them in their grief. We get to provide care for bodies—even wash people’s feet--as a kind of ministry, a way of connecting with one unique human being at a time and thus with all that is human and at the same time sacred. I would contend that in the hyphen between I and thou, nurse and patient, therein is the hyphen that connects us all with each other and with our God.
I will close with a short verse that may serve as a summation of what I’m trying to say:

**Capable Flesh**  
By St. Irenaeus as translated by Scott Cairns

*The tender flesh itself*  
will be found one day  
--quite surprisingly—  
to be capable of embracing  
The searing energies of God.  
Go figure. Fear not.

*For even at its beginning*  
the humble clay received  
God’s art, whereby  
one part became the eye,  
Another the ear, and yet  
Another this impetuous hand.

*Therefore, the flesh*  
is not to be excluded  
*From the wisdom and the power*  
that now and ever animates  
*All things. His life-giving*  
agency is made perfect,  
*We are told, in weakness—*  
*made perfect in the flesh.*

In this time of Lent, our attention is particularly drawn to embodiment as we contemplate the suffering and death of Jesus. May we keep ourselves attuned to our own embodied wholeness and connectedness to that suffering and death. And may we stand in awe of our fragile and powerful opportunities for presence with each other in our everyday lives.
SUNG MATINS

PRELUDE
GREETING
OPENING DIALOG

Ho-ly, God! Fill us this day with new breath! And we shall be living words of praise!

IORMING HYMN

1. Sing your joys, proclaim God's glory!
2. All the earth is filled with rejoicing.
3. May we learn to become your Kingdom.
4. Light our way, O God of the living.

Rise and sing, the morning has come!
Light and life, the wonder of God!
May we be your kindness and truth!
May we learn to see with new eyes!

Bless our God and praise all creation.
Christ has triumphed! Risen for ever!
Love is our calling, gift of your presence.
Jesus the Lord, our power and promise:

Song of the earth, and light from heaven:
Joy of our hearts, and hope of our dreaming:
Children of God, and spirit of Jesus:
Light for the blind, and food for the hungry:

God is a-live! Alleluia!
God is a-live! Alleluia!
God is a-live! Alleluia!
God is a-live! Alleluia!

Text: J. Trevor Jenkins, adapt. 
Music: David Haas
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PSALM 63

The congregation sings this refrain at the beginning and after each verse.

As morn-ing breaks I look to you: I look to you. O Lord, to be my strength this day, as morn-ing breaks.

READING

L: Word of God, word of life. C: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL CANTICLE

Stand. All make the sign of the cross as the canticle begins.

1. Now bless the God of Is-ra-el, Who comes in love and pow’r, Who raises from the royal house De-liv’rance in this hour. Through
2. Re-mem-ber-ing the cov-ene nt, God rescues us from fear, That we might serve in hol-i-ness And peace from year to year. And
3. In ten-der mer-cy, God will send The day-spring from on high, Our ris-ing sun, the light of life For those who sit and sigh. God
MORNING PRAYERS

Conduct:

1. Show us your mercy
2. Clothe your ministers with righteousness;
3. Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;
4. Keep this nation under your care;
5. Let your way be known upon earth;
6. Let not the needy be for gotten;
7. Create in us clean hearts, O God:

Assembly:

And grant us your salvation.
Let your people sing for joy.
In you we can live in safety.
Guide us in justice and in truth.
Your saving health among all nations.
Nor the hope of all to be denied.
And sustain us in your holy Spirit.

The Book of Common Prayer
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil, for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Music: David Haux, © 1988, JWA Publications, Inc.

FINAL BLESSING

Let us bless the Lord. And give God thanks.

May the Lord almighty bless our days and our deeds with peace.

All: Amen.

POSTLUDE