

Pentecost 19(B)

1. We have a dizzying array of readings today

- a. Esther – the events that are celebrated by the Jewish festival of Purim - commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish people from a plot to exterminate them in the ancient Persian empire 2,500 years ago
- b. James – continuing instruction for how the community gathered around Jesus functions through prayer, healing, and forgiveness
- c. Mark – continuing and complicated teachings also about the community gathered around Jesus that involve our relationship to others outside the community boundaries and our relationship to our very bodies
- d. One thread of inquiry is the question around how we understand ourselves as a people and a community who receive our identity and purpose from God

2. The kind of understanding that our diverse readings have to do with our physical, concrete existence as humans, with all our gifts and limits.

- a. The events in Esther concern the very real threat to the Jewish community. This is not simply a spiritual concern but an existential crisis – Queen Esther’s intervention literally saved an entire people
- b. For James, faith is all about our location to God and one another through prayer, visiting the sick, and welcoming the wandering sinner.
- c. And in Mark, even the removal of body parts – perhaps as a punishment, or perhaps for necessary health reasons – is considered significant in the Jesus movement. It’s good news for bodies of all kinds and capacities.
- d. Our journey with God has never simply been a spiritual matter, never just ideas in our minds.

3. In recent decades, there has been a renewed focus on the place our bodies have in our life with God.

- a. Consider our own liturgies: how many physical actions can we name? Standing, kneeling, bowing, signs of the cross, outreached hands at communion
- b. Consider too the sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, healing, and burial – every single of them concerned with the human body
- c. It seems we cannot know God, experience God, apart from our physical selves

4. God loves bodies, and this is clearly why Jesus as God in the flesh, Christ as crucified and resurrected, is at the heart of who we are as a Christian community.

- a. Like in Mark, our bodies are likely to show signs of loss, even tragedy, yet that is not a barrier to God
- b. We don't need the perfect body to fit in the perfect love to God
- c. Indeed, as Jesus says, it's better in some cases to be limited in our body parts than to have everything in place.
- d. There is something about being whole within God's reign that isn't limited by the losses we experience

5. Conclusion: our Christian faith is a physical, concrete existence.

- a. It's why our care of the sick, our attention to our neighbours, our generosity with the poor and disenfranchised is not a matter of mere words
- b. Life with Jesus is always concerned with bodies: ours and others (and earth itself)
- c. But this is not the obsession with bodies of modern media – which is an unhealthy attachment to notions of perfection
- d. We are here in all shapes and sized, with losses visible and invisible – and all of it held by God in God's embrace of love.