

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
The Transfiguration, Year A, August 6, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Body Faith”
Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Peter 1:13-21, Luke 9:28-36

if today’s Gospel sounds familiar, it is because we had it back in February; we only get it again today because this Sunday falls on the fixed date for the Feast of the Transfiguration; since I preached on the Transfiguration then, I won’t do so again today

instead, I want to look at how all of today’s readings show us the necessity of paying attention to an embodied faith; what I mean by an embodied faith is one that takes account of the importance of our bodies; in our baptism service, we pray these words for each candidate: “fill him/her with your holy and life-giving Spirit;” the Holy Spirit inhabits our bodies from the moment of our baptism; so, given the importance of the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our bodies, you would think that our faith would put a tremendous emphasis on the role of the body in our life of faith; yet that does not seem to be common; Christianity sometimes seems to have thrown the baby out with the bathwater—or thrown the body out with the baptism water; it seems that seldom after baptism do we think much about the importance of fully engaging our bodies in our faith

look at how our readings today specifically address the role of the body in our faith; Moses didn’t have visions or dreams of God; he talked with God face to face, so that Moses’ face shined from the encounter; Peter talked about what we are called to do as witnesses to Christ while we are in “this body,” since what we do while we are in our bodies so affects the experience we will have with God after we leave our bodies; and while Jesus’ transfiguration paints him in an otherworldly light, the entire rest of his life and ministry on earth is in and through his body

there are three main approaches we can make to our life of faith: there is head faith, there is heart faith, and there is body faith; while certainly personality differences come into play here, I think our culture and our denomination have given us some habits that need rethinking, because our head, heart, and body faiths seem to be out of balance

our head faith is probably where most of us live most of the time; it involves what we believe about God and how we think about our faith; that includes our activities such as reading the Bible and other spiritual books, our learning and growing through Christian education at church, and our learning that we undertake on our own, outside of church; that is certainly important

our heart faith is probably where most of us live a bit less of our time; it involves how we feel about God and how we relate our emotions to our faith; that includes our activities such as church worship and our private devotional practices; that is important too

our body faith is probably where most of us live the least of our time; it involves how we live out our relationship to God and how we live out our relationships with other people; that includes church activities such as outreach, evangelism, and fellowship, and it includes the things we choose to do, or not do, in our daily lives because of our faith; that is important too

I think it is helpful for each of us to have a balance in these three different ways of approaching faith; use our head faith; use our heart faith; make sure that we use our body faith

we do have Episcopalian bodily liturgical conventions in church: our kneeling, sitting, and standing in worship—what some people call Episcopal aerobics; we walk from our pews up to receive Holy Communion, where we receive the body and the blood of Christ; we touch each other as we pass the peace; we may go to receive the laying on of hands for healing prayer on the first Sundays of the month; we may go light a candle as a visible reminder of a prayer we have offered in our monthly Celtic Services; it seemed quite a coincidence this morning to find that the online *New York Times* featured a 10 minute video documentary about a drive-in church in Daytona Beach, where people stay in their cars and listen to the service over their radios; that may be better than no church at all, but do note what a contrast that is from the close presence we have with each other here

but there may not be as much that we do outside of church that reminds us of the important role of our bodies in our life of faith; so how might we bring body faith more informally into our daily lives?; here are five suggestions:

how about being especially attentive to the way we speak to people and the way we treat people?; you know the song “they will know we are Christians by our love;” do people know that you are a Christian, not because you have told them, or because they know you attend church, but because of the ways they can see that you embody love?; and I don’t mean how you embody love to just family and friends, but also to the strangers you do not know

how about being especially attentive to our demeanor?; what does it say about us as persons of faith if we are often anxious, or fearful, or distrusting of people?; how powerful it can be for us to model a spirit of “joy and wonder”—more words from the baptism service—to people around us

how about extending the forgiveness that God has already given us to people who may have wronged us in some way?; not just to forgive them in our heads or in our hearts, but to go to them, in person, to offer that forgiveness; in every service we pray the Lord’s Prayer and ask God to “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”

how about putting our hands to work in acts of compassion?; when we put ourselves in places and in activities where we can help those in need in person; when we continue, with our hands, the same kinds of ministries Jesus undertook during his life on earth, which he has entrusted into our hands to continue

finally, how about being present as witnesses whenever or wherever injustice, or prejudice, or hatred is being expressed?; to put our bodies in the thick of difficulties and take Christian action for justice, for equality, and for love; Jesus says over and over, “Follow me;” that means that we will go where he would go were he present in our world today; remember, Jesus is only bodily present in our world where we Christians stand, bodily, in his name

head faith, heart faith, and body faith are all needed, and they all work together; making sure that we use all of them insures that our faith will have a stronger, more visible, and more lasting impact upon the world