

John Sampson
"Even In This Body"
Text: The Gospel of Philip 57 - excerpt
Preached at KVCC
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Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Stories of resurrection.

Beginning on Easter we've heard stories of unexpected new life from the gospels, the collections of good news, attributed to Jesus's followers and friends. We heard the story of the women, who loved their friend and teacher, waking before daybreak and walking to his tomb, finding it empty, and fleeing in fear. We heard the story of Thomas doubting that the reports of resurrection could actually be true until he placed his finger in Jesus's wound. We heard of people coming to life and bursting their tombs open in Jerusalem on what we call Good Friday, because their resurrection, their new life, just couldn't wait until Easter. And last week we heard a story of disciples meeting a teacher on the road only to discover it was Jesus when he broke bread with them.

We hear these stories of resurrection from the gospels that are collected in what we Christians call the New Testament. But just like those people resurrected in Jerusalem, who weren't Jesus, and who couldn't wait until Easter, stories of resurrection haven't been, and can't be, contained by the gospels many of us are most familiar with. There's just too much good news, too much weirdness, too much spiritual energy to be contained in only a handful of tellings, and retellings.

So this morning we hear another version of the story of resurrection, but from a different collection of good news, a collection that never made it into our New Testament. Today's reading comes from the gospel of Philip, a text found in the Nag Hammadi library buried in Egypt and discovered in the 1940s.

And the telling of the resurrection story we hear today has so many odd and unexpected aspects to it. It is both very familiar, and very unfamiliar at the same time, because it talks about Jesus, and his body, and the Spirit of God, and of new life. But it also tells us that resurrection is not just for Jesus, and is an experience open to all of us in this life, and not something that comes after death.

But should we be surprised that we have such an unorthodox reflection on the meaning of resurrection from a gospel attributed to Philip? You may remember the

story of Philip, filled with God's Spirit he is one of the first deacons, one of the first anointed servants, of the early church. He's the guy who meets the Ethiopian eunuch, and in one of the queerest passages from the Christian scriptures allows the eunuch to be welcomed into the community of Jesus just as he is, even though his gender and sexuality blurs all the lines.

In his meeting with the eunuch Philip imagined the unimaginable. In his meeting with the experience of resurrection Philip, or at least the author who took his name, again imagined the unimaginable. The writer imagined a resurrection in this flesh, even in this body. Imperfect, ordinary, capable of the most debased acts, and of the holiest efforts. This body – your body, and my body – are vessels of pure potentiality. They are vessels, which could hold nothing less than new life.

What will you make of your body?

That is the question that Philip asks us, because there is nothing outside of our bodies. Nothing. They're all we've got.

Will we let Jesus be our teacher, because he's got something to say about what we can do with our bodies, how we can transform them, how we can ready them so that we too can experience resurrection right here and right now and in this flesh.

Philip tells us that Jesus's body is built on the Word. Jesus's body is built on words. Words like blessed are those who thirst for righteousness, for doing the right thing, because they will be filled. Words like love your neighbor as yourself. Words like it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle. Words like healing, and compassion, and humility. These are words that Jesus didn't just like, they were so ingrained in who he was that they became like flesh to him. And he invites us to make these words so central to our lives that they become like flesh to us too.

Philip also tells us that the breath is Jesus's blood. The word that is translated as breath here is the Greek word pneuma, which means breath, but it also means spirit. It is God's pneuma that hovered over the waters in that pregnant pause before the beginning of Creation. It is God's Spirit that entered Jesus, which allowed our teacher to heal, and to cast out demons and raise the dead. It is the pneuma that brought to life the words that made up Jesus's flesh. The pneuma of creation and life and liberation was so ingrained in Jesus that it became like blood to him. And he invites us to make the pneuma, the Spirit, so welcome in our lives that it becomes like our own blood.

Word and Spirit. Flesh and blood. This transfigured body that Jesus holds out to us as our true human potentiality is the resurrection body. It is the resurrection in this flesh, and in this life. And it is by taking on this body that we participate in the truth of Easter.

Resurrection is not reserved for Jesus. And it isn't possible only after we die.

It is God's invitation to us now, even in this body.

Alleluia!

Amen.