

Where is God? After the Exodus, the Hebrew people associated the presence of God with the Ark of the Covenant, a special box which carried the Ten Commandments and was housed inside a mobile sanctuary called the Tent of Meeting. Later, after they settled in Canaan, King Solomon built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem as a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant, where worship and sacrifices to God were carried out. Five centuries later, the temple was destroyed by Babylonians, and the people carried off as captives. Where was God now? Without the temple, Jewish worship focused on the Torah, the teaching, believing that God was in the community of those who lived by the Torah.

When Jesus came on the scene, he declared “the kingdom of God is very near.” (Point to self). Yes, the presence of God is very very close to you. (Point to self, with questioning look on face). Yes! You! I’m going to tell you a big secret—are you ready?—Jesus was a body. One of the big ideas Christians believe in is the incarnation—that means, the en-fleshment, em-bodiment of God in Jesus. Jesus was a body, was flesh, like we are. But this wasn’t the first body that God inhabited. When God made Creation, they made all bodies, God put themselves in all created bodies, and called them GOOD! Somewhere along the way we forgot the most basic and obvious thing—there from the beginning of time. God is in bodies. Really!! Even our bodies!

But we don’t like bodies. We have been trained through our White western culture to hate our own bodies, which are never good enough and to hate and fear other bodies—Black and brown bodies especially. It causes all this division and enmity—between White bodies and Black bodies, between with immigrant bodies and not-as-recent immigrant bodies, between skinny bodies and fat bodies. The same body-hating culture has taught us to hate and fear most bodies in Creation—wolf and coyote bodies, rodent bodies, insect bodies, spider bodies, worm bodies, fungus and bacteria and “weed” bodies. Instead of welcoming them as necessary, beloved parts of Creation, we cut our selves off from them and/or kill them off.

The pandemic has heightened this fear of the “other” as we have been instructed to isolate, distance ourselves, and fear the air, the touch, the presence of others, which might carry the dreaded virus. It’s also revealed the terrible divides in this country between White and black, White and Latinx, the well-off vs the poor. There are so many divisions between our bodies.

The apostle Paul says that Jesus came and **with his flesh** brought together people who had been at odds with each other. The Great Divide of New Testament times was the divide between Jews and Gentiles, basically Jews and everybody else—Romans, Greeks, pagans, polytheists, etc. Jews were taught to despise Gentiles, whose bodies were considered unclean, as were dead people and menstruating women—and Gentiles were taught to hate Jews, who were strange and cliquish and turned their noses up at perfectly good food.

But Jesus, we are told, came to bring together both sides, not by just getting them to be nicer to eat other, but by reconciling them through his own body.

Paul says, “Jesus is our peace; **in his flesh** he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . that he might **create in himself one new humanity** in place of the two, thus making peace, and might **reconcile both groups to God in one body** through the cross.” Two bodies joined into one. . . this sounds a lot like the passage from Genesis that is often read at weddings: Adam recognizes Eve as “bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh”:-~“Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become **one flesh.**” Jew and Gentile **became one flesh through the body of Jesus.** Some weird divine marriage thing going on.

So how does this happen? In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tries to take the disciples away to a quiet place to rest. But they are mobbed by Jewish people seeking them out. Still, Jesus has compassion on them, and so from his body, his mouth, he fed their souls by teaching them. Later, he crosses the Sea of Galilee and goes among Gentiles. They brought out all their sick, so that he could heal them, and they begged to touch the fringe of his cloak to be healed. Gentiles. People whom self-respecting Jews would not touch and they dared to reach out and touch him and be healed. By his body. Wherever he went, Jesus crossed over boundary lines to give people what they needed—food, teaching, healing—to Jews or hated Romans, to rich or poor, to clean or unclean, to tax collectors, sinners, or self-righteous people. And when both Jewish religious leaders and Gentile political leaders conspire to kill him, he comes back with a message to all: no matter what you do to me, to God, we still love you. In his body, all are united in love.

Right now, one of the biggest divides we have in this country is the racial divide, especially between Whites and everybody else. In his excellent book [My Grandmother's Hands](#), social worker and trauma therapist Resmaa Menachem makes the link between body trauma and racism.

What is the connection between trauma and racism? An extreme example of this comes from the story of Shannon Martinez through Yes! Magazine. When she was fourteen, she went to a party and was forced into sex by two twenty-something White men (Yes! Magazine, Winter 2020). Martinez didn't have words for her experience for about a decade, when she realized that she had been raped. But her body knew that she had been violated and traumatized—that experience boiled up into a burning rage and self-loathing. She started hanging out with the angriest people she could find—neo-Nazis. Their worldview allowed her to channel her anger and to blame other people—Jews, gays, Blacks—and to feel righteous as she carried out acts of violence against them. It was an outlet for the trauma she could not face. Eventually, she did face it, and then Martinez found her life's work in helping people transition out of extremist White supremacy groups. That means, she helps them deal with the trauma that made extremism so attractive in the first place—because in every case, they have experienced trauma or deep unmet needs.

Now, that is not the experience of a majority of White people. But, Menachem says, we live in a culture of White-body supremacy—where White bodies are valued and Black and brown bodies are devalued, feared, and hated. It's all around us, which is why most White people don't recognize it, because we

think of it as “normal.” Why is it that White-bodied police keep shooting and killing unarmed Black bodies? Why is it that otherwise open-minded White people have an automatic fear response to seeing black men walk down the sidewalk or driving or doing anything?

Menachem says that White-bodied supremacy culture has traumatized ALL of our bodies—Black and brown bodies, indigenous bodies AND White bodies. And police bodies. We have been conditioned to react negatively to other bodies—Black and brown bodies—and to blame them for our unhappiness, to blame them for their own difficulties, which our White culture has caused them. Some of the trauma is unprocessed pain that our ancestors went through—poverty, violence, persecution, hunger, leaving family and land to come here. Some of it comes from our country’s history, which was founded on unintentional and intentional genocide of indigenous people, cultural erasure and stolen land, enslaving people to work the land and serve the economy. This trauma is passed down from generation to generation, an embodied history of violence and shame that we hardly dare to acknowledge. Most of us don’t know our family histories and our real American history. It is full of trauma.

Menachem says that we can’t think our way out of racism, because it is deeply embedded in our bodies. We have to face our internalized traumas instead of inflicting them on other bodies. We have to live through the “clean pain” of learning the truth, getting grounded in our bodies, retraining our responses, and allowing ourselves to be healed. It is a long, difficult process, but it is possible.

After her parents kicked her out, Shannon Martinez ended up moving in with her boyfriend’s mother—Carol Selby. Martinez saw herself as a hot mess of a human being by this time. But Selby saw in her something else—not a “vile skinhead” but a “cute little elf.” Given love, respect and space, Martinez started doing chores and taking care of Selby’s younger sons, and within a few months left behind the neo-Nazi ideology. Selby embodied Jesus’ love and acceptance, and opened the door to start healing the trauma. Martinez has taken on the anti-radicalization work for others. It’s long, exhausting work, mostly unpaid. It’s transformative, bridging the gap, dealing with the trauma, bringing bodies together. Jesus was a body. Jesus came to remind us that we are beloved bodies, always valued, always able to be healed and to heal. We did not cause the traumas that we have suffered or inherited. But we are responsible to address them and to move forward.

How do we start? I suggest that you read Menachem’s book. Better, read it together with others and do the body practices together. It’s about practicing. Incorporate prayer with it, because it’s difficult work. Invite the embodied Jesus into your anti-racist practice—his healing, his touch, his forgiveness, his transformation.

Let’s end by doing a little body practice. Sit comfortably with your feet on the ground, if you are able. Feel supported by the chair and the ground. Close your eyes, if you like. Take three long breaths in and out. Breathe in, breathe out. Allow your body to relax. Pay attention to your body. Where does it feel relaxed and comfortable? Where does it feel pain, or constriction, or tension. You may find this easy or difficult. No judgment. See if you can breathe into the tension or pain, see if it can relax. Do you carry



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fear in your body? Where does it reside? What does that feel like? Do you carry love in your body? Where does it reside and what does that feel like? Return to your breath—consciously breathe in and out. Your body is the home of God. Christ is here, within you, within your very cells. Christ is the love that resides within you; thank him for his presence here. Christ is also here in your body in the places of pain and fear. Invite him to be with you in these places, to hold them and open them to his healing touch. Gently take another breath and return to the present.

Christ came to bind our bodies together in himself—all of our bodies. It begins with your body. And my body. The more we practice becoming aware of our bodies, the more we are able to process trauma, the more we rely on Jesus for healing and courage, the more we can move towards healing our very divided world. Let us pray. **Amen.**