

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Your Body | Matthew 26:41**

We talk to the children about the body, we look at a video, we listen to an incredible song, and there's not much doubt that our bodies are just incredible. They are, as Dickens would say, the best of times, but our bodies also produce the worst of times, don't they? Last week the highlight of my week was one of the worst things that can happen. One of our staff received a call on the spur of the moment from the Hennepin County sheriff's department asking if we could help. They were about to raid a brothel in St. Louis Park, and instead of putting the young women prostitutes in jail, they wanted to look beneath the surface to see these young women whose passports have been taken from them and sold into sex slavery. They said, "We want them to feel not like they're going to jail, but that they are coming to a new place." The best and the worst of the body together.

You know, when you preach you're never really sure if what you're going to say is relevant. I thought it was sort of a joke that I got a bad cold right before I was supposed to preach on the body. Is there any challenge to your faith that comes from your body or is it basically all just fine? If you look at our world you might say there are some issues. You talk about the idea of weight and the body. We spent over 60 billion dollars in America last year fighting against a 400 billion dollar fast food industry. Who's winning? Or sexuality—all different slices of this, but every second of last year 28,258 users were watching pornography on the internet. Forty million Americans regularly visit porn sites—a third of them women. Thirty-five percent of all internet downloads relate to porn. A friend of mine from seminary, a professor, was saying, "We need to talk more about this. I can't get my students in seminary to talk more about it because they are losing the battle themselves. This is not them, this is us", he said. Maybe that's not you. You wonder how anybody can screw up like that, but maybe for you it's body image. We spend 250 billion in the states—probably it would cost a little less than a billion dollars to give everybody new clothes every year—250 billion on clothing, and 62 billion on cosmetics. There were 14 million plastic surgeries, and less than a half a million of those were for medical purposes. Maybe it's not body image for you, maybe it's just sleep. You just wish you could sleep! Some of you need to sleep more because you're workaholics. You're working too much. Others of you just can't get to sleep. You need machines that help, or medication. Forty-one billion dollars of sleep medication was sold last year. We don't talk about this often, but many of you are addicted to something or you're right on the edge, or you live with someone who is a victim of alcohol, drugs, or opioids—over 400 billion dollars in social costs this last year. That's depressing. And, speaking of depressing, between 8-12% of us at any one time are on medications for depression that hit the body hard. Let me just stop right there because I'm going to talk about the body and I'm going to talk about different things. The key is to make sure that you hear that the drugs that help us with anxiety or depression or ADHD or whatever,

that's not the issue. For many of you the issue is not taking those medications, and the idea that our bodies are broken.

I don't mean to get political, but if you want to talk about the body, talk about the fact that 20% of our nation's GDP goes to medicine. Twenty percent. And in that, it shows we are a culture that worships youth and young bodies and disdains age and older bodies. Just look at TV. In our culture when we talk about bodies, we idolize baby pictures and we are terrified of talking about death—although it's true that our bodies are mortal; they will all die. We're not sure, but somewhere between 30-55% of all medical costs over your entire life will happen in the last 12-15 weeks of your life, many of which are used to keep your body alive for just a couple of more weeks in ways that are not the way anybody wants to live.

So you look at the idea of the body and you wonder if the body has anything to do with the faith? And you're most likely to say, *boy are they screwed up out there! Glad that doesn't happen anywhere in the church*, and that's just so not true, right?

I know that because we did a little survey at the start of this series and one of the questions was about the body. If your body could talk to you, what would it say? Two hundred and thirty of you said, "My body would say, 'Thank you for taking good care of me'", but one hundred seventy-five said, "My body would say, 'Feed me better.'" Three hundred of you responded, "My body would say, 'Move me more.'" One hundred sixty-six of you said, "My body would say, 'Please, slow down. Let me rest.'" And forty-seven of you said that your body would say, "Take me to the doctor right now, please." So, I don't think this is about them. I think it's about all of us, and for those of you who are a little older and this set of temptations is not the problem, I had a spiritual director who was with me until he was 91. When he was 86, five years before he died, I asked him, "Hey, when do you think I'm going to have some mastery over this lust sexuality thing?" He said, "Well John, I'm 86 and when I got into the pool the other day, I wondered if that girl noticed me." I'm just saying . . . it's all of us.

What's the story of your body? What's God's story for your body? We're here because we believe that God is telling a story to make sense of life and you're in that story. At the very beginning is the beginning of the body. So God created man and woman in His own image. Male and female. God created them, and they were naked and they were not ashamed. It was great. It was those bodies up on the screen (shows slides), but only two chapters later in the story came the fall and the turning away from God. Death entered the picture and broken bodies were issued for everybody that followed. They were naked and not ashamed, but we have been ashamed in one way or another ever since. Now that's not the way it's supposed to be, right?

The prophet Jeremiah talks about what it was like from the beginning.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew who you were. [Jeremiah 1:5]

Before you were even born I made you special. That's what Kathleen was trying to say to the kids. *You are special. I made you exactly as you are.* But life goes just like that and the psalmist talks about the other end of life—about our mortality.

² Before the mountains were born or you made the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. ³ You turn people back into the dust (from dust you remain and dust you'll return) . . . ⁴ because a thousand years in your sight are like a day that goes by, like a watch in the night . . . But for us, our days come to seventy years, or eighty if we have strength, but they quickly pass, and then we fly away. [Psalm 90]

Sounds grim, so into that God keeps going with the story. He wants to offer hope. Paul says to the church in Philippi,

Jesus will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body, the after death body, by the power that enables Him to subject all things to Himself.
[Philippians 3:21]

Death will come to you. It will not be the worst thing that happens to you. It will not be the end of the story, so there's hope, but we live in that in-between time, don't we? So let me just give you today's part of the story. It's from the end of Matthew 26. Jesus is going to be betrayed that night and He goes away with His disciples after the last supper and prays, and He asks them to pray with Him. Then it says this:

⁴⁰ Then Jesus returned to His disciples and found them all asleep. "Couldn't you keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. ⁴¹ "Watch now and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
[Matthew 26:40-41]

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Boy, do I live that. Could I just make sure that we understand that in our understanding of the Christian story, faith is not about souls? One shortcoming of the people who love the Bible is that they read the Bible and they say, "When I come to Jesus I get new life." True. "When I come to Jesus I will live forever." True. "When I come to Jesus I will have life in heaven." True. That does not mean that God cares about your soul.

N.T. Wright says, "In the Bible, resurrection is the restored body of Jesus the King coming back to His kingdom, and bringing your body back to life in some mysterious way." God loves bodies. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He's got great plans for bodies. Calling the church "the body of Christ" shows how serious flesh and blood beings are to God. You are not being saved by God just so you can get to heaven, you are being sent to heaven so that your body can be made whole. And I guess what I'm saying is that I think you are lying to yourself if you don't realize that your body is broken. Different than the person sitting next to you, but your body is broken, too.

Tim Keller talks about the idea that spiritual sickness is like when somebody breaks a

limb. I've been off and on hindered with my left knee and when my knee is fine, I'm fine. I can run, jump, laugh, cry, and I don't think about it at all. But when it flairs up, I can't think about anything else. Everything focuses on my knee. I'm obsessed. *Is it getting worse? Is this worse than yesterday? Oh, what do you think is going to happen?* And Keller says "In the spiritual world, broken views of the body result in a preoccupation with the body." Broken views of the body in the spirit result in a preoccupation with the body. That's not helpless. I think that Jesus Himself comes as a body. He's the primary witness to the union of flesh and spirit before God.

Paul says, "The same power that raised Christ from the dead makes our body part of Christ." Your body has been bought by Jesus Christ, who gives life from above to your body and wants to show you a way to honor God with your body. It could be different. It could be better, so what goes wrong with your body in the course of a day?

I don't know if you read David Brooks' book *The Social Animal*, but he says, "Everybody grows up in surroundings that train us to think a certain way, feel a certain way, speak a certain way, act like people around us." It's sort of like "monkey see, monkey do" and most of the time that's really good news. How else would you learn how to speak unless you watched everybody else? But that "monkey see, monkey do", everybody act the same also embodies in us the brokenness that permeates the human race. We become trained to act a certain way. We become trained to what John calls the "The cravings of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." Broken practices become habits, habits become choices, our choices shape our character, and then that broken body feels like it's normal.

When I graduated from college, I used to talk to kids about faith. I'd do a camp and it really was not that hard to tell kids that they were screwed up because they knew it. When they're away from their parents they would admit it. To talk about Jesus' love and forgiveness and His desire to give them new life—they were all for it. The part that I don't think I understood back then was the strength of the body. I think that when a kid or a grandmother comes to Jesus, new life happens, but our body doesn't automatically shift to the side of heaven. Our body stays stuck in the world and in the habits of the world. Now, occasionally you hear a story of somebody coming to Christ and they are healed miraculously. I believe that. Occasionally somebody is addicted, they come to Christ and are immediately set free from that. I believe that happens, but that's very infrequent and all the habits of a broken world come in the next day on that same body. The prophet Isaiah is given a vision and he says, "Woe is me because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and I have seen God and boy are we in trouble."

There is a sense that when Jesus talks about discipleship, He makes clear that a person cannot be the servant of all the demands of your body, the cravings of the flesh, and also succeed in following Jesus toward real life. That's why Jesus speaks over and over about denying yourself, about taking up the cross daily, about losing your life in this world for His namesake—all being part of the Christian experience That's not popular to talk about in our culture. We want new life in Jesus and we want all the good stuff, too.

But let's say you say, "My body's broken, I want to change it, how do I change? I believe in Jesus." Let me tell you, the challenge for me is that a person can't overcome all the hardened patterns of desire by force of will alone. I can want to do it and I still don't do it. For example, in the story I said we were going to look at today—the spirit is well, the flesh is weak story—Jesus tells His closest followers, His best friends, that before the night is over they're all going to run away like scared rabbits, and they all say, *No way. Everybody else will run, I'll be with You till the end. I'm with You all the way*, and they believed it, and they were emphatic about it and Jesus said, "We'll see". The police show up and they scatter like scared rabbits because their bodies had a life of their own. Their bodies would not support their intentions. Listen to that. Their bodies would not support their intentions. I desire to weigh about 195 pounds, but I drive by Yum and Pattycake sucks me in.

You cannot overcome the desires of the body by force of will alone. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. So how do you deal with that? I believe there's a war between what God desires of your body and the dangerous mold of the world that's squeezing your body into another shape. I spent about 45 minutes with one of my friends this week and listened to her story at length. She's one of us. Her name is Lee Blum. I asked, how did the world squeeze you into its hole? I'm going to share with you about five minutes of her story, but we're going to put all 45 minutes of the talk that we had on our website because it was just fabulous and I would encourage you, if your struggle is anything like this or you know somebody who struggles this way, to listen to this. I asked Lee, "How did the world try to squish you?" Here's what she said . . .

[Link to video shown: <https://vimeo.com/205833193>]

Lee wrote a book called *Table in the Darkness* about that part of the journey and a new one that's just out called *Brave is the New Beautiful*. Whether it's you or someone that you love, you can find out more about this journey.

Yours may not be that dramatic, but what's your plan? What's your plan to get rid of the broken body you have and live the way you're destined to live? One of the reasons I asked Lee to speak is that 80-90% of American women dislike their bodies. That is the world squeezing us. What's your plan to get away from that toward the life that you're destined to live? Don't think that it comes with being a pastor or being a spiritual giant. The apostle Paul was about to go to the church in Rome and he sent a letter by way of introduction. And in the letter he says, "I don't know what's going on, but it's like there's this war inside of me. I want to do the good thing, but I end up doing the bad thing. With all my might I struggle to avoid doing the bad thing and that's what I end up doing. Who will deliver me from this terrible predicament I'm in?" He needed a plan. Paul's idea was not to try harder, not to make a New Year's resolution. Paul's idea was that he had to put off the old him somehow and instead put on somebody new. Not fake it, but he had to become somebody new. This is what he says in the twelfth chapter of Romans:

¹ So I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy

That is—because we have a mercy-filled God, I urge you...

to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,

That is—bringing your bodies before God and saying, *here I am*

holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Bring your broken body to God and say, *God, I can't seem to fix this sucker*. And then God says,

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. [Romans 12:1-2]

Be transformed by God's light coming inside and saying, *you are loved just as you are*.

I asked Lee, "What would you tell your kids"? And she said, "I would tell them that every morning God wants to say, "I adore you." You don't have to get better for Me to love you. I love you just fine today and I will help you make choices toward health. Choices that lead to life and all its fullness." Our part is not to try harder, it's to keep faith and hope in Christ and then to use our bodies in ways which retrains them. Retrains them from the way of the world to the way of the new world. Retrains them.

I have to tell you all—that video we saw—I don't think people woke up and said, *I think I'm just going to do that*. I've never done that before in my life. I think they had to train themselves over and over and over and over to do something they couldn't do when they first thought of it or when they first saw it. This is what Jesus means in taking up your cross. We retrain our bodies and it's not so much like a marathon. It would be a joke for me to go out this afternoon and say, "I'm going to run a marathon". I couldn't do it. No matter how much I wanted to, not matter how hard I tried, I could not do it, but I could start to retrain my body and jog slowly around the block, then maybe a block-and-a-half next week, and then two blocks. I can't do it by my desires or by my effort, but I could retrain myself. That's what the apostle Paul is saying. Retraining, spiritual retraining, is anything that you can do right now in order to be able to do something you can't do right now by trying harder. You see the difference between training and trying? That's what Jesus is doing. He's showing the retraining—He calls them the disciplines—of our life in the body when we fast, when we pray, when we get a loan, when we are quiet, when we serve others, when we study. These are ways that retrain our body.

So, let me give you two examples. What if my broken body manifested itself mostly in a wicked temper? I have a mouth like you wouldn't believe. I'm fine all day, you cross me, ugly things are going to happen, and you say or I say, "Hey, it's just because that's the way I'm wired. I run hot." Is that going to be acceptable? How could I retrain that? I need to admit that I have a problem, acknowledge that I want to do better, and that I did ask God's help. But then I would need to practice controlling my temper, and I don't think that it happens by not trying to lash out when somebody whacks me. That's just never going to work. *Well, I only broke his nose. I didn't hurt him bad this time. I'm getting better*. No, I need to begin further upstream away from that time. For instance, a retraining might be that I would get away by myself for a really long time—two or three hours and not have a word spoken. Be there in silence and think about the words that I

ordinarily use when I get mad. If I thought about them in advance I might learn something. Probably that will require solitude. Maybe a retraining would be that I could think about the people that I most often do that with and think of positive things that I would love for them and write them down and then radically tell them before the blow up. Small choices retraining me that I can do that will have long-term effects.

Now, let me speak to only 80% of us—this idea of the body and lust. Millions of people say that they just can't stop. They're just like those people that lose their temper—this is the way I'm built—but I believe lust can be broken if that's what we deeply want. We can choose to put ourselves in a different position; for many men that's in front of the computer. You don't have to look at the body parts of other people, and you can train your thoughts away from lusting, but only if you retrain the habits, the attitudes, and the thoughts that lead up to that minute. One of my friends said he started to change when he created higher priorities than beautiful naked women. He said his higher priority is sitting next to his computer screen and it's two little girls "that are my daughters and they are fully clothed and they are beautiful and I try to look at them first."

Another of my friends was tempted sexually and he put a picture on his desk of a nine-year-old boy who had been named after him. When he looks at him he is reminded of the man he wants to be becoming. One of my friends realized that he couldn't do it alone, so every week his computer is downloaded to a friend who holds him accountable to all the sites he is visiting. Small steps will move us in a new direction. Training and retraining the body is where faith meets grace.

Now we're going to close like this. Here's a list of broken things and I want you to find yours:

- Weight
- Sexuality
- Image
- Sleep
- Addictions
- Depression
- Medicine
- Worship
- Youth, Disdain Old
- Death-Phobic.

For many of us it's multiple choice. What's the one that strikes home most today? Are you sick? What I'd like you to do is just walk with me through this little exercise together. Close your eyes, would you?

Lord, I'm a broken body. How do I stop over-working to make other people like me? How do I stop watching porn or abusing my body with alcohol? How do I take those medications that I need? Lord, You've told me that we need to be able to recognize the truth and whether that's anxiety, or weight, or a fear of death,

please show each one of us where we are a broken jar. Where are we a cracked pot today? God, instead of saying *I'll do better*, I need to ask You for help. I need to present my body to You and ask for help. Worship is acknowledging that You are God. That I cannot deeply change without You. Worship is saying that I don't have the ability to please you God because You already love me. You already love me. And then God, with this broken body of mine, I ask You to show me and my friends today one small choice, just one small choice. A retraining today where I might gain a little hope. Would you do that God? And then Lord, as I listened to the stories today I realized that we are not meant it to go it alone. We're in this church where everybody looks good, talks good, drives good, but we need friends to tell us the truth and love us. We need professional help and I'm remembering that theologian that called it the Fellowship of the Bleeding Heart. I like that, but I pray that You'll make this a church that's the Fellowship of the Cracked Pots, the broken bodies, all of us, so we don't have to pretend, but we can look for Your grace. So, may the love of You Father, and the grace of Your son, and the peace of Your beloved spirit help us become whole today. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.