

What if the Hokey Pokey is What It's All About?

Genesis 2:5-7, 18-24

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If you spend any time watching TV, reading magazines, going to the movies, or scrolling through social media, you may have noticed that looking flawless is the norm. News anchors are more likely to look like swim suit models than they are Walter Cronkite or Tom Brokaw. In magazines, the people in the ads for the clothes we love and the skin care products we buy don't have our love handles or laugh lines. On social media, the pictures our friends post make us wonder what kind of lighting they have in their house. We may know in our heads that pictures don't tell the full story, which includes hours with a make-up artist, photo filters and retouching, but this constant exposure to perfection affects us. Take a look.

*Scroll through 3 split screen pics.

The photo on the left is the untouched photo, the photo on the right is the one that actually appeared in the magazine story or advertising campaign. These pictures tell us that beauty is thin, perfectly proportioned, and does not include bumps, wrinkles, chapped lips, or freckles...all things most of us happen to regularly possess. The images we are bombarded with send us two conflicting messages...that our bodies are excessively important or they are not important at all.

On one hand, we are inundated with images of bodies sculpted to perfection, people who spend their lives focused on their appearance, and making that appearance perfect, and we can't help but compare ourselves to what we see. On the other hand, the story lines in movies and on TV shows have characters drinking too much, eating too much

or too little, treating sleep as if it's optional, and promoting generally unhealthy lifestyles. And the normalization of cosmetic surgery straddles this tension because our appearance is so important that having surgery to correct our perceived imperfections is the norm, yet having unnecessary surgeries carries with it a significant amount of risk. Is a flawless body worth it? More importantly, is a flawless body possible and who decided what is perfect and what isn't? Truly, it is complicated, these relationships between human beings and our bodies. Some of us are so obsessed with all the things our bodies are not that we find it impossible to appreciate our bodies for what they are. Conversely, some of us have been so fixated on developing our minds, spending thousands of dollars and hours on education, that we have neglected our bodies because it's what's up here that really matters.

Into this reality, scripture speaks, telling us human beings were created by God, in God's image, examples of God's creative activity and also participants in God's creative activity. In chapter 2 of Genesis, we find one story of how human beings came to be. This is a translation by Rev. Dr. Lisa Davison, Hebrew Bible Professor at Phillips Theological Seminary. It includes a little Hebrew which we will talk about!

*4b In the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. 5 No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no grasses of the field had yet sprung up; because the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a flow would well up from the ground, and water the whole face of the ground. 7 Then the LORD God formed ha'adam from ha'adamah, and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life; and ha'adam became a nephesh.

18 And the LORD God said: 'It is not good that ha'adam should be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for it.' 19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every bird

of the air; and brought them to ha'adam to see what it would call them; and whatever ha'adam would call every living creature, that was its name. 20 And ha'adam gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for ha'adam there was no fitting counterpart.

21 So, the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon ha'adam, and it slept; then the LORD God took one of its sides, and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22 And the LORD God took the side taken from ha'adam and made a woman, and brought her to the man.

23 And the man said: 'This one is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cling to his woman, and they shall be one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his woman, and were not ashamed.

*This passage tells the story of God who was intimately involved in the creation of human beings. God created that first human, named ha'adam, which is a play on the word ha'adamah, which means ground, earth, or soil. Human beings are not created on some factory assembly line starting with a pile of pieces, and duck tape, ending somewhere way down the line, with the finished, fully assembled product.

*No, ha'adam and all human beings, were created more like a piece of pottery. God, the potter, took the clay, or in this case, soil, and formed the human. And then it was the potter who breathed life into ha'adam, making the human being whole. The human was suddenly more than the soil from the ground, the human was a nephesh or soul...body and soul, created whole. It might be important to note that, in this story, human beings are the only one of God's creations who received this breath of life, becoming nephesh. This is the passage that literalists point to when they argue about whether or not dogs go to heaven. Somehow, I think that argument misses the point of the story.

The point is, we were created, we are, whole selves, not just a right arm, left foot, brain, or heart. We are body, mind, and soul, and they cannot be separated, yet the world likes to force us to compartmentalize our lives, labeling us based on only part of our whole selves. But the truth is, we aren't just our weight, the signs of age on our faces, our acne, what we do for a living or who we are to our partners or kids, or the instrument we play, or the sum of our failures. We were created whole and it is our whole selves that desire connection with other people and with God. It is our whole selves we have to figure out how to bring to our relationships, including our relationship with God.

Christianity hasn't done a great job communicating this message of wholeness. In general, the Christian tradition elevates spirit over body as if they are able to be separated completely. We could learn a little something from our Jewish brothers and sisters about this. The Jewish tradition connects physical acts to spiritual practice without somehow suggesting that the spirit is superior to the body. The ritual practice of circumcision is an example of this connectedness. Jewish males physically carry this covenantal sign on their bodies, reminding them that we "do" religion with our whole selves, including our bodies.

And consider sex. (Yes, I said sex in church.) Rabbinic sources suggest that the intention of sexual intercourse is unity with one's partner and with God; but Judaism's recognition of the spirituality of sex does not come at the expense of sexual physicality. One rabbi made the point plainly: Before sex, he taught, you should give thanks to God for the pleasure God created." Similarly, Rabbi Abraham of Slomin wrote, "When the heart opens up due to pleasure then is the fit time to come close to holiness." (Winner, Lauren F., *Mudhouse Sabbath*, 84-85)

This is the essence of this sermon series, *Spirituality for Busy People*. Seeking and, hopefully finding, ways to come close to holiness. We long

for connection with God and the good news is there are things we can do to encourage that connection. Last week, we focused on reading the Bible and other sacred texts. We gathered Wednesday to try an ancient practice called lectio divina (divine reading). Today, we turn to spiritual practices that engage our bodies, recognizing that our bodies are part of our spirituality because we are part body.

There are so many ways we can connect with God through movement and body awareness.

*Yoga is a popular spiritual practice for people of all ages, abilities, and faith traditions. In their book, *Spiritual Practices for a Busy Generation*, Teri Peterson and Amy Fetterman write, "A major part of yoga practice is about breathing. The breathing of yoga practice is deliberate and deep, and flows into every part of your body. The breath itself is the core of the practice, and is, in many ways, the core of all spiritual practice. In the beginning God breathed the breath of life into us...The air that flows in and out of our bodies is the very breath of God, bringing life to bodies that would otherwise be just flesh and bones. Every breath is sacred."

This Wednesday evening at 7pm, we have the opportunity to try yoga. Lisa Roll will lead us in this spiritual practice. She assures me her time with us will truly be for people of all abilities and will focus on practices that can be safely performed in a chair. Please join us if you can.

If yoga isn't your thing, never fear! Any activity that allows you to move your body, breathe in and out deeply, and focus on the physical part of you, can create a connection between you and God. Dance like there's no one looking. Do the Hokey Pokey, just in case that's what it's all about. Take a walk, and yes, stop and smell the flowers. Get a manicure, pedicure, or massage...connect with the Holy One as someone else cares for you. As your tension melts away, let go of all the things weighing you down; guilt, regret, anger, fear.

*Yoga Master, Erich Schiffmann reminds us, "Love is what's left when you let go of everything you don't need." Consider trying out different postures for prayer; kneeling, lying down, sitting crisscross applesauce, or use a tabletop labyrinth or walk one.

One final thing...you can't do spiritual practices wrong. I have been talking with some of you and realizing even in my own life, the need to be perfect shows up in so many ways. We are afraid to try to be silent because we might do it wrong, think about the wrong thing or fall asleep. We don't read the Bible because we don't know where to start. Open it up to the middle...that's the book of Psalms. We have never tried yoga, what if we don't like how we look in yoga pants? We cannot mess up trying to connect with God, unless we don't try. We can only learn what works for each of us and practice those things with our whole selves. "Put your whole self in."

Whatever you choose to try, I hope you will thank for the ways in which God is working toward wholeness in the world and in you. Amen.