

Called to Community

A CALL TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Malcolm Guite “Flesh & Blood” film)

In today’s film, Malcolm Guite makes a very direct parallel between what Jesus did and what we are called now to do. Could it be so simple as to do what Jesus did and simply emulate his physical movements and actions? What does this say about how the Church should be organized?

Watch “The Role of the Church”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Malcolm Guite’s says, in response to the question, “What is the role of the Church?”, that “The role of the Church is not church growth. Any organization that is obsessed with its own growth is essentially cancerous. So, I guess, Paul speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ. So if I want to know the role of the Church I look at role of the Body of Christ, as Christ was walking alive.”

- A. Does it surprise you that church growth would be called a cancerous obsession? Why or why not?
- B. Paul speaks in several different places of the Church as the Body of Christ. Read two such places: Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. What does Paul say about the role of the Church?
- C. Does it surprise you that Guite correlates the actions of Jesus with the role of the Church so directly? Is Jesus anything that the Church is not called to be or is that call one in the same?

2. Guite lists several things that the physical body of Jesus Christ did and draws a direct correlation to the role of the Church. Things such as “moving around the place, he’s not stuck in one building, he’s touching people where they are, he’s healing them where they are, he’s giving good news, he’s challenging people. He’s also getting crucified. Church needs to be there as well.”

- A. These are challenging words for a faith that centers itself around meeting in a building. Read what Jesus says about the way his

body is to be the center of the faith rather than a physical temple building in John 2:13-22.

- B. Can the Church touch and heal people in the same way Jesus did or must we think of these things metaphorically? Is there any possibility we sell ourselves short and we actually have more power to heal than we give ourselves credit for?
- C. What does it look like for the Church to be crucified?

3. Guite recommends going through the gospels and taking note of Jesus's physical actions, "what he does and what is done unto him."

- A. Divide up the four gospels amongst your group and skim through them to create the beginning of such a list.
- B. What does Jesus do?
- C. How does the Church do that? Can it?

What if the Church ... lived more fully into its call to be the Body of Christ?

For much of the history of Christianity, the physical body has been looked at with suspicion, if not disdain. On one level, the apostle Paul seems to set a life of "the flesh" against a life of "the spirit" (though some interpret "the flesh" as more akin to our modern understanding of the ego rather than anything to do with the physical body). Gnostic Christianity in the first century went so far as to devalue the entire "world of matter" in favor of the "world of spirit." Interpretations and misinterpretations of St. Augustine's duality of "the spirit" and "the flesh" further complicated the matter. And the Church's modern struggles with issues around sexuality and reproduction also illustrate our mixed feelings and lack of sophistication in knowing how to address the body.

Jesus, however, seems to care about the physical body, a lot. Much of his earthly ministry centered around the healing of people's physical infirmity. Our traditional belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus values the importance of the body, otherwise why would the gospels go to such length to demonstrate it was him in the flesh and not a ghost? And the fact that Christianity is the only major world religion that believes God became incarnate in human form would seem to mean that we believe in a God who values the physical existence as much as the spiritual existence. It may, in

fact, mean that the two are not opposed or even separate but rather are a part of one unified field of being.

How can the Church live more fully into its call to be the Body of Christ? We can understand this call on different levels. As Malcolm Guite notes, we can and should understand this in a very practical way to mean doing what Jesus did. If the Church spent more time outside our temples, outside “the city,” outside the centers of power, in the places where ordinary people live and the places where we will encounter those who are not welcome in all the usual places, that would likely be enough to revolutionize the face of Christianity.

If we take this call even further it might lead us to a deeper sense of union with one another in which all churches, no matter what the sign outside says, understand themselves as different members of one body, each with our own valuable role to play. In this way, our divisions might cease if we no longer could say to one another “I have no use for you.”

And if we take this call all the way to its conclusion, it might mean that we too learn how to conquer death in all its forms. And we too might raise the dead to new life. And we too might live in constant communion with the God who is the source of all that is, no longer needing to form and prove our own identities but resting in the assuredness of God’s grace and love and showing all the world how to do the same. That would truly be good news.

Christ's peace,
Rich Nelson

P.S. For an additional film beyond the scope of this curriculum bundle that relates to this topic, consider watching Barbara Brown Taylor’s “Speaking to the Body” at <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/speaking-to-the-body> and Danielle Shroyer’s “Worship and Practice” film at <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/worship-and-practice>

