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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

July 3, 2022

Proper 9, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary Track 2

[Isaiah 66:10-14](#)

[Psalm 66:1-8](#)

[Galatians 6:\(1-6\)7-16](#)

[Luke 10:1-11, 16-20](#)

Rejoice with Jerusalem, you who love her, and you shall nurse from her consoling breast, and be dandled on her knees.

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One of the nice things about being a parent of two young children is having exactly one kid for each knee.

I had one of those two-knee moments Wednesday morning of this week, sometime in the midst of the chaos that is trying to get everyone out of the house and to school. One of the things I didn't imagine before becoming a parent is the sheer physicality of it: a physicality that can be exhausting, toting a 30-pound human being on one hip while trying to open a car door, balance a sack of groceries, retrieve a fallen toy, and so on. But a physicality that can also be profoundly sweet, when a 30-pound human being or two crawl into bed with you or snuggle up on a lap. There are a lot of things I won't miss about the small-children phase of parenting, things to do with exhaustion. But I know that as ages grow and boundaries appropriately shift, there will come a time when I miss the physical intimacy of this season, our bodies casually snuggling together easily and often.

We humans are physical beings. And while we have different thresholds for it, most of us crave some form of physical closeness with others. And there are times when we miss it desperately, like when a partner dies, or when a relationship ends, and we find ourselves single after a long time, or when a worldwide pandemic keeps us isolated for months at a time and struggling for lack of physical connection.

We are physical beings created for physical connection. And our Old Testament reading is one of the best portrayals of physical intimacy with God in all of scripture. I think this may be the only place in the Bible that uses the word “dandle.” In the first few verses God tells us to imagine a personified Jerusalem as a mother that can nurse us from her consoling breast, tote us around on her arm, dandle us on her knees. And then the imagery shifts and it’s not just Jerusalem but God herself we’re invited to imagine in this way: “as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.” One of the most wonderful instances of feminine and maternal imagery for God in the Hebrew Scriptures. And I think it’s good for us to just take a moment and sit with this image and imagine ourselves being dandled on God’s knees and nursing from God’s breast, and not only how delightful this is for us but also how delightful it is for *God*, God as our parent rejoicing and reveling in the physicality of our snuggling closeness. This is how much God delights in us. This is how much God delights in you.

Now of course we are in a fraught moment in our national life right now and a lot of it has to do with physicality and bodies and especially the bodies of mothers and children. It’s the physicality and intimacy of the growing baby in its mother’s womb that makes some feel so strongly that abortion is a tragedy and that unborn babies should be protected at all costs. And it’s that same physicality and intimacy that makes others of us feel so strongly that, when hard choices have to be made

about that growing potential life, for the government to intrude into that mother's body and choices is simply wrong. And so we come to this Independence Day weekend with deeply raw and mixed emotions, singing songs of freedom and liberty even as we reel from what so many of us believe is a devastating blow to freedom, one that takes place in the midst of a stew of toxic and dysfunctional politics, free and fair elections under threat, a body politic immobilized and incapable of acting to respond to crises like climate change. And yet we still long for so much of what this country represents, or hopes to represent, or has so often represented only for some but maybe could represent for all, for things like freedom; and having a say in who leads us through our votes; and equality of opportunity; and equal protection under the law; for a country that aspires not just to say but to mean and *do* liberty and justice for all. We come to this weekend hoping and yearning for all those things even as we are so divided about what they represent.

And we know that as followers of Jesus we have a citizenship that is truer and deeper and longer-lasting than any earthly one. It's a citizenship in what Jesus calls today "the kingdom of God." He sends out his disciples, seventy of them, a great throng, not just an inner circle like the Twelve but a mixed multitude of ordinary believers like you and me, and he tells them that in going out, wherever they go, they are bringing the kingdom of God near. He uses that word "near," tells them to say "The kingdom of God has come near." And I think again of that physical intimacy, of closeness, of bodies in the same space. No, the disciples aren't toddlers crawling up on the laps of the people they're preaching to—but they're showing up with their bodies nonetheless, coming into these villages and relying on the hospitality of whoever they meet. Coming under people's roofs, sleeping in their homes, eating their food, drinking their drink. They're establishing relationships, and it's somehow in that intimacy of hosts and guests and sitting at

the same table, eating the same food, breathing the same air that the kingdom of God is coming near.

And I find myself thinking this Independence Day weekend about this country and about how much we are simply bound to each other whether we like it or not. About the sheer physicality of sharing this space, this land from sea to shining sea, a land so soaked in blood and sorrow but also in beauty and abundance. About how we are bound to each other and we had better learn to live with one another and love and care for one another's bodies with our own bodies.

When Jesus came among us with his own body he didn't start a new nation or a new government. Nor did he start a business or a corporation or even a club. What he created was a body. What he created was a church that in a very real and even literal sense has functioned as an extension of the physical body of Jesus since Ascension Day. We are the Body of Christ, St. Paul tells us. And our physical connection with Jesus and one another is formed in a common bath and reinforced each week in a common loaf and a common cup, sitting at the same table, eating the same food, drinking the same drink. Just as the seventy served as an extension of Jesus' presence during his earthly ministry, going on ahead of him to every place he himself intended to go, so you and I and each member of Jesus' body is an extension of his presence today, and where we go he goes.

May you and I bear the living presence of Christ wherever he would have us go, in this troubled and beautiful country or to the ends of the earth, today and for all our lives.