

July 14, 2019
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 10
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Amos 7:7-17
Psalm 82
Colossians 1:1-14
Luke 10:25-37

We all know the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We know it well. We know it, we get it, and we even wholeheartedly agree with it—at least in principle. In practice ... well, it's easier to talk than it is to walk.

That's as true now as it must have been in Jesus time. Jesus is pretty crafty in setting the standard for loving others to be the same as loving oneself. We humans live in constant conflict between loving oneself and loving others. We want to love others, but Our rationalization comes from approaching so much of life as if our lot is to survive a zero-sum game: there are only so many resources to go around, and therefore we must be very careful when we slice the pie. It would be *irresponsible* to do otherwise; we're *supposed* to be good stewards of our limited resources.

I must say here that love is not a zero-sum game; there is no pie, because love is infinite. But you've also heard me say that love is more than an idea. Rather than a noun, love is a verb; it's concrete action. Love is walking the talk, and walking the talk requires resources. I don't know about you, but when it comes to resources, my personal gas tank feels pretty low right now. A person can have very legitimate reasons for feeling that way: I'm too tired, I'm too broke, I'm too busy; I'm already doing my share. To complicate things, our Gospel story next week is the one in which Jesus tells the busy Martha that the idle Mary has "chosen the better part."

But before we can go there, we need to be here. Here, we're still walking on by. We're walking on by because we have seen our neighbor but marked them as something *else*, as something *less*, as something *other*. It's as if we wear sunglasses that only let certain people into our field of neighbor-recognition. The result is a societal distribution of people according to categories of wealth, class, skin color, sex, sexual orientation, physical ability, and oh-so-much more. The breakdowns within those categories aren't created equal; we all know how the rankings play out. Sometimes we even notice how it all functions to help the privileged keep growing in privilege. And yet we still play into the game.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is so very *physical*. It's about *physical* vulnerability. *And* it's about physical *strength*. It's about bodies, and what one body can do to or for another. Many of us grew up with an inherited Christian tradition that contains a suspicion of the body. And so let me say this clearly: it's a suspicion that Jesus himself does *not* seem to share. And why would he? Jesus is God made fully human—which is to say, God made fully embodied. Jesus doesn't express a suspicion of the body. In this parable, as he does so often in the Gospels, Jesus talks about human love experienced and expressed through the physical. It makes sense. We *are* embodied beings. The physical is the only means of experience and expression that we possess.

I regularly preach about what it means to be embodied. Apparently I'm still figuring it out. This is a common theme at Christmas, when we celebrate the incarnation of God as Jesus the Christ. It's not Christmas, but *embodiment* has been especially on my mind in recent weeks. And so it is that, yes, today I'm joining the #USWNT preaching bandwagon. I'm sure all my colleagues are on it today. Admittedly, until a couple of weeks ago I didn't even know what #USWNT even meant. In case *you* don't know, the USWNT is the United States Women's National Team—that is, the U.S. Women's World Cup Soccer team.

I arrived late to the World Cup Soccer party. That was largely because much of the tournament coincided with the other reason that *embodiment* has been much on my mind: my mother's brief illness. I expect that her death left me particularly open to relishing what World Cup drama remained, and there was still plenty. It wasn't just that the team offered an antidote to grief, though it did that. It was also because of its emotional juxtaposition to what I had just experienced.

The championship game was played just last Sunday, although that feels like weeks ago to me already. In another coincidence, last Sunday was also the anniversary of my personal coming out day. On *that* day, 27 years ago, I was 30 years old and living in Seattle and—as impossible as it now seems—I didn't know a single out gay person. Not a one. In *Seattle*. I had been fighting internal denial and shame and anguish since puberty. That July 7, I picked up the phone and called the local gay community center to inquire about coming out support groups. I reached that point through a process of claiming, rather than avoiding, my own embodiment. I did that through physical activity: hiking, backpacking, jogging, bicycling, weightlifting, and—don't laugh—Jazzercise—which, by the way, I have recently rediscovered. I now describe it as moving into my body for the first time.

Knowing all that, it will not surprise you to hear that I have leapt on the Megan Rapinoe bandwagon. In case you have been completely out of the loop and out of the news, I should say that Megan Rapinoe is the star of the U.S. Women's World Cup Soccer team. She's an athlete-old 34, an out and proud lesbian, a troublemaking feminist. Given a pulpit seen around the globe, she has charged her congregation to make the world a better place.¹

Rapinoe's star-power has resonated with me for particular reasons, but I am far from alone in that experience. She has struck a chord for many. For some of us, it's about being older and lesbian and feminist. But we are not her only fan demographic. And so there must be something else going on. I think a big part of it is her bold physicality and her shamelessness in owning it.

And so you will perhaps forgive me for now invoking the image of Megan Rapinoe in her signature post-goal celebratory pose, which goes something like this: [demonstrate]²

I imagine you've all seen that image by now. Through that gesture, I see her claiming her unique embodiment, claiming the space she occupies in the world. It feels, not arrogant, but unapologetic. It's strong, and at the same time vulnerable. It is life- and light-filled joy.

It's a gesture that many of us could benefit from discovering and repeating. I know this because, the truth is, it's a gesture that I find uncomfortable even to try to emulate. That was hard for me to do just now. How much harder would it be for us each to claim our own gesture? When I came out, when I moved into my own body, I finally claimed my unique embodiment and the space I occupy in the world—sort of. In fact, I only edged in that direction. For many of us, for many reasons, those are lifelong occupations. We need all the all help and encouragement we can get.

We *have* enough; we *are* enough. It's true, but most of us doubt it constantly. Told that the game is zero-sum, told that categories matter, worry impels us to constant, wheel-spinning doubling down. Our doubt just keeps us in the game. Our doubt may even be the exact reason why we so often fail to recognize the neighbor right in front of us.

My two sisters and I tended my mother's failing body in her last days; we were with her when she died. As she had cared for us after birth, we cared for her near death. Naked vulnerability offers the opportunity to love. Where there is love, there is life.

I sometimes grump about the fact that, these days, our *only* heroes seem to be athletes. But I'm going with our soccer stars, at least for a while. I do so knowing that they will soon reveal themselves to be real people—real people, just like us. Maybe that's good, too. They're human, like we are. And, like each of them, each of us is our own fabulous self.

Notes

¹ In her comments after the ticker-tape parade in New York City celebrating her team's World Cup championship, Megan Rapinoe concluded: "This is my charge to everyone: We have to be better, we have to love more and hate less. Listen more and talk less. It is our responsibility to make this world a better place." As reported by Victor Mather and Danielle Allentuck in "Megan Rapinoe Steals the Show at the Women's World Cup Parade," *The New York Times* online, July 10, 2019 available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/10/sports/soccer/soccer-parade.html>

² See, for example, the photo by Bernard Tessier of Reuters in Derek Van Diest, "Rapinoe gets last laugh for U.S. against France at World Cup," *Toronto Sun* online, June 29 2019, available at <https://torontosun.com/sports/soccer/van-diest-rapinoe-gets-last-laugh-for-u-s-against-france-at-world-cup> (accessed July 13, 2019).

