

Savior of Soul *and* Body

Trinity 7 – w/ Rite of Holy Baptism
Mark 8:1-9

#1105
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What do you do with the body? It's the question that every murderer must ask. Just watch the news, or any murder mystery movie, or any episode of CSI. The murderer always has to do something with the body. And, ironically enough, it's always the body that leads authorities back to the murderer so that justice can be served. What do you do with the body? It's also a question we routinely ask at the time of a funeral. Do we put the body in a casket and bury it in the ground, or do we cremate it and respectfully place it in a mausoleum?

Even when we get away from the dark and morbid things, the question still stands: What do you do with the body? It's actually a very pressing question for all of life. Some Christians these days talk about a "theology of the body" as they seek to live all of life – especially physical life – to the glory of God. So, what do we Christians do with the body?

Today Jesus teaches us to embrace the body and the physical world just as much as we value our soul and spiritual life. He teaches us to view our bodies and the whole physical world as holy and precious. You see, Jesus is our Savior not just of the soul, but of the body as well. Jesus makes us holy not just in soul, but also in body, because He is the Savior of soul *and* body.

Luther said it this way in his *Large Catechism*: "For Christ [has] not come to destroy soul or body but to help both." We get into trouble when we try to divide and divorce what God has joined together in the healthy marriage of soul *and* body, of spiritual *and* physical.

On the one hand, we might try to focus only on the material world and deny the spiritual. We might worship the body—live only for the moment, live only for immediate physical pleasure. We might think that all the material stuff in the world—eyes and ears, mountains and oceans, planets and stars—is all there is. We might think that somehow, in some

unexplainable, unknowable way, all things physical suddenly exploded into existence billions of years ago. We might think that our bodies are ours to do with as we please—pierce them, tattoo them, get them drunk, get them high, eat and drink whatever we want whenever we want. We might try to make our bodies as fit and trim as we can merely to attract the opposite sex for a good time. We might live, think, and talk, as if there's no spiritual reality at all.

On the other hand, we might try to focus only on the spiritual world and deny the body and the physical world. We might look down on the physical stuff of the earth. We might think that worshipping God "*in spirit and truth*" (Jn. 4:24) should not include physical things such as hymnals, or kneeling, or making the sign of the cross. We might neglect taking care of our bodies, thinking that it's, well, not spiritual enough. Without realizing it, we might actually subscribe to that ancient heresy of Gnosticism that said material things are evil; you must somehow move beyond the physical world to the world of pure thought and spirit. We might even succumb to the New Age philosophy that says this physical world is but an illusion.

But do you know what? These wrong views of the spiritual and physical, of soul and body, only tear asunder what God has joined together in a happy marriage. After all, Jesus Christ is Creator and Savior of soul *and* body.

In our first reading today, we hear how God created Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden. Look at all of this wonderful physical stuff! No, human beings did not evolve from lower life forms. Rather, "*the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*" Body and soul joined together! Then God put the man in a garden, full of plants and trees that give physical food, located in the midst of physical, geographical rivers. Why did God join the physical and the spiritual? So that Adam would "*work it and*

keep it.” God created us with bodies to serve for His glory and for the good of His creation.

In our Gospel reading, we hear the story of Jesus feeding the 4000. Again, wonderful physical stuff! For three days a great crowd had listened to Jesus preach and teach about God’s spiritual kingdom of life and forgiveness in Christ alone. But Jesus also has compassion on them for their physical needs. He does not want them to go home hungry and famished and faint along the way. So our gracious Lord feeds them. Seven physical loaves of bread—what a great reminder of the seven days of physical creation—and a few small physical fish. And when the Lord finished feeding them, when everyone lounged around with full tummies, *“they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full”*—again, a great reminder of physical creation. All this from the Lord Jesus who came to save and enliven both soul *and* body together!

You see, Jesus did not come merely to redeem our souls; He also came to redeem our bodies, to make them holy too. When we look at Jesus, *“the founder and perfecter of our faith”* (Heb. 12:2), we get a perfect picture of how God joins both soul and body. The Athanasian Creed says it this way: “As the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ.” In Christ Jesus spiritual and physical are perfectly wedded together in His Incarnation. No either/or; but rather both/and—both spiritual *and* physical. And this perfect God-Man, Jesus, suffered, died, and rose again in soul and body for you, for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

St. Paul tells us in our second reading today: *“Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”* This is not just a spiritual reality; it’s also a physical reality. Because of Jesus—the physical, fleshly Son of God—you are set free from sin. Now you serve God in both soul and body.

Notice how our Lord gives us His spiritual realities of forgiveness, life, and salvation in very physical ways. Baptismal water is poured

over your physical body to wash away all your sins and give you spiritual life with Christ. We get to see this today (at 10:30) in the Baptism of Magdalena Makaria. What a great name! “Magdalena” comes from Mary Magdalene, whom the Church remembers today, and “Makaria” comes from the Greek word for “blessed.” Mary Magdalene may have abused her body in the “oldest profession” on earth, but once blessed, rescued, and enlivened by Christ Jesus, she lived in both soul and body to His glory. In Baptism, this spiritual-physical Sacrament, Magdalena Makaria gets to live that same new life in Christ.

And very shortly, we will again receive our Lord’s spiritual realities of forgiveness, life, and salvation in the very physical gifts of bread and wine. In this Eucharist our Lord’s Body and Blood will touch our physical tongues on the way into our physical bodies. His cross-won, resurrection-guaranteed life and salvation make us holy in both soul and body.

So, in Christ Jesus you are set free from worshiping the body and free from denying the body. You are set free from sin and made slaves to God. And what a wonderful bond that is! Every physical action you do has spiritual significance. Everything from changing a dirty diaper, to taking out the trash, to eating supper, to kissing your spouse is “supercharged,” if you will, with spiritual reality. You can pick up a littered soda cup or you can enjoy the beautiful majesty of rugged mountain peaks. It’s all “supercharged” with holiness that comes from Christ. When you drive safely, when you walk the dog, and when you do your job faithfully, you are serving as God’s holy people.

So, for we who are called Christians, for we who are redeemed and made holy by Christ’s holy Body and Blood, all of life, soul *and* body, is holy. With soul and body happily married in Jesus Christ, everything a Christian does is holy. Amen.