

Embodied Love: An Ontological Understanding of Christ's Body as it Impacts Disability Justice

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I remember sitting in the first row pew of my church's sanctuary as a sophomore in high school with seventh grader, Riley, sitting next to me staring at my open computer screen. We were the only two people in the room because it was Confirmation small group time. We both were very aware that the other groups weren't this small, and they definitely weren't led by someone who was only two years older than the confirmand themselves. But this was a "special scenario", or so I was told when I was asked by our children's director to be Riley's leader. "You both enjoy writing, and, well, you'd just *get* each other," the pastor told me. I agreed, because I loved getting to take leadership in the church and I had always been someone who considered herself a misfit, so when I heard that Riley didn't quite fit in with the rest of their confirmation group and leader and needed a different situation or they wouldn't be able to participate, I was excited to get the chance.

As I thought about it more later on, I wondered if Riley was the one who determined that it was their last chance, or if the church was ready to tell them they couldn't be part of the program if this didn't work. For other students, this of course would have never even been a question.

In the first few weeks of working with Riley, I was told all about Autism, although the church staff was reluctant to use that word. They explained to me why there was "just no way" to make it work for Riley to fit into a group of peers. They needed one-on-one attention. When actually spending time with Riley, though, I could never quite figure out why that was. They were incredibly witty, loved talking about books, writing, and deep faith questions, and seemed

to deeply enjoy connecting with me, even though at times it was clear that they wanted to be part of the group they were formerly in.

During that time of leading Riley, I didn't identify as Disabled, although later it became clear that because I was, it was obvious that I should lead Riley, even though the groups had up until that point always been led by parents. Instead of telling us that, though, we just heard over and over that I would "just *get* Riley" in a way that no one else would, or likely for a reason that no one else wanted to acknowledge.

In this particular moment that Riley and I were sitting on the pew together both deeply invested in what was on my computer screen, we were working on what was called our "creative interrupt". Creative interrupts were assigned to each group based on a topic and were an opportunity for the students to introduce that night's lesson in a fun way. That year, we were covering in depth the meaning of The Lord's Prayer. Riley and I were, maybe obviously at this point, an afterthought, so instead of being assigned to cover "forgive us our sins" or "for thine is the kingdom" we were just supposed to do something in general about The Lord's Prayer that would fit in on a night where there was extra space. That was only because I asked for them to allow our "group" to do a creative interrupt in the first place.

But as many Disabled people get used to experiencing, we took what we could get and worked to write the best story we could and then eventually presented it as readers theater along with the help of my younger sister who was a confirmand as well.

Riley wanted to imagine themselves in the story and understand what it would practically be like to have stood in front of Jesus as he spoke the words of The Lord's Prayer for the first time. In the years to follow, I would take Riley's lead and use this sort of writing as a spiritual practice myself. In this moment, though, I wondered again why Riley's input would not have

been far more powerful to a group who could all take on this spiritual questioning that Riley and I got to enter into.

We researched the context of The Lord's Prayer and dove into what Riley's life would be like if they were to happen upon Christ giving The Sermon on the Mount. This piece of writing impacted me so deeply that I have saved it and still am in awe of the ways that Riley and I were able to enter into this moment in scripture together.

The story started with Riley feeling on the outskirts of life and specifically Jesus' ministry. Together we started off the story, "Life just kept going. Day in and day out, Riley kept following the same path--doing the same thing--stuck in the same rut. As a child, that's all they could do. It was all they were allowed to do. But they longed for something more--something to come into their life and break their chains to society. Their heart ached for a purpose, a plan, anything that would make them feel full. Not so worthless." The Riley in this story then went on their daily walk to go get water for the family and encountered a crowd, all hanging onto every word of what the man in the front was saying. Right after Christ finished praying what comes to be called The Lord's Prayer, Riley and I wrote their response, "Tears that encompassed every emotion possible streamed down their face. All they could think about was the words of that prayer. The prayer was so... real! They would be forever changed by it. They wanted to praise God's holy name. They wanted God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done. They wanted a glimpse of heaven on earth. They needed God to provide for them. They needed God to forgive them and help them forgive others. They needed God to keep them from evil and temptation. They knew that this life was about God's glory and power and kingdom forever. But most of all, they knew that God loved them and that this man in front of them was their Lord and Savior."

Even just in this story that we wrote, it was clear to me as Riley's leader that they wanted a connection with God but felt disconnected from the church community. This project on the Lord's Prayer became a sort of entry point for us to enter into asking the questions of what it would mean to truly feel connected to God and the Church and how we could get to that point.

With this honors project, it is my hope to expand the understanding of how everyone can connect to God and the Church from a Disability Justice perspective, this story of the first time I questioned the connection between disability and theology has been often at the front of my mind. This entry point of The Lord's Prayer was so helpful in our journey to understand God from the perspective of Disabled people, and so I believe it can be a powerful entry point for everyone to connect with Disability Theology on a new level.

As we wrote in our story so many years ago, the prayer is so "real". It is connected to the everyday experience of being embodied, the deep need we experience, and the concrete relationships we have with others, God, and our own bodies. This realness is particularly why it seems so important to serve as the starting point to understanding how Christ's embodiment relates to Disability Justice and Theology.

Within the context of The Sermon on the Mount, Christ introduces this prayer connected to themes of radical love and embodiment. This sermon is full of teachings around how to best live specifically as it relates to the body. Jesus speaks of ideas around practical, embodied experiences such as mourning, adultery, food, clothing, salt, light, anger, marriage, relations, and compassion. Much of, if not all of, the sermon is directly related to the physical body, going so far as to metaphorically note removing parts of the body that cause sin, or relating the ideas around worry to how one's body will be fed, clothed, and cared for. Jesus then gives The Lord's Prayer in order to exemplify exactly how individuals and communities should pray as it relates

specifically to their bodily life. “On earth as it is in Heaven”, “daily bread”, and even ideas of “temptation”, “leading”, and “trespasses” can be directly understood as embodied concepts that relate specifically to the lives and bodies of those praying for this connection to God.

In addition to this message of embodiment, The Lord’s Prayer and the surrounding sermon can be readily understood as a prophetic teaching. In his book *Prophetic Imagination* theologian and scholar, Walter Brueggemann asserts that, “Prophecy is born precisely in that moment when the emergence of social political reality is so radical and inexplicable that it has nothing less than a theological cause” (Brueggemann 10%). Ultimately, he spends the book describing prophecy as both social action rooted in love and compassion for those who are marginalized as well as a theological hope connected eschatologically with the power and presence of God. These two profound topics linked together bring the type of prophetic imagination that Brueggemann believes is in Christ’s ministry and life as well as in prophets across time. This understanding of social change and eschatological hope is deeply present in the foundations of The Lord’s Prayer specifically because of the embodied nature of the sermon and prayer, and the embodied presence of God who is speaking it.

Fundamental to the goal of this paper is the understanding that Disability Justice can be deeply prophetic in similar ways. The push for social change and the uplifting of marginalized people is central to the call of Disability Justice, but more than that, when done in specific ways, leaders in the Disabled community often bring an eschatological hope of community, love, and justice. This is clear explicitly in the works of activist and author Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in her book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, as well as her addition to the book *Disability Visibility*, entitled, “Still Dreaming Wild Disability Justice Dreams at the End of the World”. In both of these works, Piepzna-Samarasinha imagines a future that is fully

embracing of Disability Justice. In the latter, she writes in a utopian fashion, making statements starting with “Remember the first time...” (Wong 7:21:29-7:21:31) that list beautiful and powerful Disability Justice hopes that have not happened yet. She writes as if they are a memory in order to instill the hope of a just future in readers. Piepzna-Samarasinha’s work is foundational to the Disability Community, and powerfully links together the ideas of social change and eschatological hope that are the core of Brueggemann’s work.

Linking the prophetic ideas of leaders in the Bible and the Christian tradition with Disability Justice practices and dreams will fundamentally bring together a theological hope for all people based on the specific understanding of Disabled peoples’ experiences and hopes. Brueggemann is explicit when he notes that social change for marginalized people is theologically important for everyone and takes that idea even further by explaining that, “the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominate culture around us” (Brueggemann 9%). Much of his book works to assert the importance of theology focusing on the culture on the margins in order for it to fundamentally impact the way that theology is understood by everyone. This link to change for marginalized social groups is necessary for theology as a whole. The goal of this paper is fundamentally to directly connect principals of theology and Disability Justice that, while not otherwise connected, will lead to a specific and prophetic understanding of theology as a whole.

In order to understand Disability Culture enough to create this important theological link, understanding the perspectives and language that arise from Disabled leaders that are the foundation of their work is deeply necessary. Particularly, in this paper, the use of identity first language and a broad take on the Social Model of Disability will be used almost exclusively

unless noted otherwise. As described in the article entitled “Between Necessity and Possibility”, in the anthology *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, it is helpful to note that, “As a response to the so-called “medical model” of disability, many theorists now emphasize an alternative approach to disability, which focuses on how society constructs barriers to human beings with certain physical or mental limitations. This perspective challenges how these limitations are subsequently perceived as impairments only because society is unable (or unwilling) to accommodate the needs involved” (Brittain 52%). Disabled advocates push against the Medical Model of Disability, which describes a disability as something medically “wrong” with the person. Instead, the Social Model, focuses on the Disabled person as someone whose particular body is practically disabled from doing something because of the way that thing is set up. For example, in the story from earlier, Riley’s Autism was not something “wrong” about them medically, instead it was a different and powerful way of being in the world, but the church and culture at large disabled Riley from fully participating in the Confirmation program, thus, Riley is a Disabled person.

Understanding the Social Model well, means that being Disabled is not something problematic about the person. It is something profound and meaningful about who they are as human beings as bodies in the world. Yet, their particularity is not welcomed in the world, so there is something problematic about the culture and structures that person is in. Author and Disability advocate Keah Brown explains her ideas around identifying as Disabled and Black by noting that, “If we are made to go through the world every day knowing that it is not designed with our bodies in mind or with our human rights at the ready, we deserve the chance and the space to identify as we wish and to be proud of our identifiers. To embrace the communities that welcomed us when society essentially turned us away. I love my identifiers for this reason:

because they are mine in every way, even when they mean that I am distancing myself from what is perceived to be normal” (Brown 2:09:11-2:09:35). Thus, many Disabled people find pride in the identity first language that they use. Person first language would suggest that Riley is a person with autism, but identity first language asserts that Riley is an Autistic person, and thus Autism is noted as an important identity such as a Black person, a Queer person, or a Christian person. The capitalization of words like Blind, Disabled, and Autistic are important to claiming that identity. By identifying in that way, many Disabled people feel pride in their identity because as the Social Model explains, being Disabled means that someone is different in ways that make them unique and connect them to a community of other Disabled people. That community connection is powerful and an irreplaceable culture in many Disabled people’s lives. To further that, identifying as Disabled is honoring of the ways in which people are still being excluded and disabled from engaging in the world and to use that identifier claims that one is connected to a long line of history and community surrounding that identity.

These concepts are the basis of the Disability Rights movement and an understanding of them brings about ways to better understand Disabled leaders, which is the only way to make the social change that the goal of prophetic hope calls for. Linking Disability Justice and theology is fundamentally at the core of liberation for all people because of this prophetic understanding that it brings. In order to understand in depth these connections, following The Lord’s Prayer, this project aims to focus on Christ’s body, Disabled bodies, the Church as the Body of Christ, and the broken body of Christ in the Eucharist and on the Cross. Doing this through the format of The Lord’s Prayer is key to developing the prophetic, embodied, and liberating work of Christ and of Disability theology.

Our Father, Mother, God Who Art in Heaven, Hallowed Be Thy Name

There is something truly beautiful about God incarnate entering into the world and our lives and teaching us how to pray. This act means something for both God's otherness, as well as God's relationality.

Ultimately, it is about radical, transforming love. Jesus Christ stands in front of a crowd, and proceeds to explain to particular people how they should communicate with the Divine. Even more than that, the prayer being so deeply embodied is important because God is not only telling people how to pray, but how to pray with their particular lives and circumstances in mind. The deep relationality and absolute otherness of Christ is arguably most clear in this moment; a prayer to God in Heaven honoring God's holiness and asking for it to come, while being the Word of God in flesh living embodied among them is full of paradox, love, and deep reality.

Understanding this radical otherness and profound relationality is one of the major tasks of theology. God is particularly present, and yet fully other. Often this otherness, or transcendence, is understood without the relationality of Christ. Instead, it is important to be aware that the same God who art in heaven and is proclaimed to be holy, is right there in front of the crowd. Theologian Mayra Rivera spends much of her life's work focused on this understanding of "relational transcendence" and she notes that, 'Wary, and a bit weary, of the usual formulations for transcendence--beyond being, beyond time, beyond creation, beyond materiality--I have opted instead to being with the simple assertion that God is irreducibly Other, always beyond our grasp. But not beyond our touch' (Rivera 3%). This touchable otherness is the paradox of Christ as fully human and fully God. In this moment, the wholly transcendent

God is here, touchable, and teaching how to pray not in a way that is outside of human understanding, but directly linked to the experience of being embodied.

This holiness and transcendence embodied in Christ is something focused on by many scholars and theologians, including in the realm of Disability Theology. Before fully understanding how Christ as human, as body, and as God is so powerful to Disability theologians, though, it seems particularly important to come from within a framework that understands how, and why, people think about bodies, and particularly Disabled bodies, in the way that they do. In order to fully note the significance of Christ's embodiment as it pertains to Disabled people, the framework of what Disabled bodies are understood to be is deeply relevant. To do this, going back directly to a Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of the body and disability to notice where current bodily ideals come from is deeply important. Many of these ideals have been unknowingly adopted into current ways of thinking and impact the way bodies are understood today.

In both ancient times and modern culture, a Platonic and Aristotelian approach to the body has deeply impacted the understanding of Disabled bodies and lives. Because of the weight that these two foundational philosophers hold both in Christianity and body politic, it is important to be aware of their influence in order to understand and critique the ways that Disabled bodies are interpreted and treated even now. This connection between Plato and Aristotle and the modernist disability framework at work in the world, will ultimately help analyze the origins of what is currently, albeit falsely, believed to be natural and bring an understanding of where these harmful bodily ideals came from.

First and foremost, to understand Disability Justice as opposed to the modern understanding of the body, it is important to analyze the body soul dualism that penetrates

Christianity, philosophy, and the modern world. While it is often believed that the disconnect between body and soul is a natural phenomenon, the clear origins of this idea come from a Platonic and Aristotelian framework. Fundamentally, this belief, especially when taken as the natural order of things, is a denunciation of the body and honoring the soul. This is harmful for the Disability community in that bodies, and thus bodily differences, are thought of as an inherently negative part of humanity, instead of something to be honored as a beautiful aspect of what being a human ultimately means.

Starting with Aristotle's definition of the soul as: "characterized by two faculties, (a) the faculty of discrimination which is the work of thought and sense, and (b) the faculty of originating local movement." (Aristotle "The Complete Aristotle" 1108), it is evident that the soul is already thought of as in opposition to a Disabled body. Defining the soul, as he does, as far superior to the body, and then making it known that he believes the soul's primary function is "thought and sense" and "originating local movement" is directly implying that bodies in which those functions are impossible or done vastly differently are impeding the nature of the human being itself. Because this has become the prominent understanding of how humanity functions, now, Disabled bodies are understood as the antithesis of what it actually means to be human when what human is, is foundationally defined by Aristotle as the soul.

Platonic understandings of body/soul dualism are not much better, and in fact push even more deliberately against the embracing of a Disabled body. Plato first asserts that the soul, which is the form of human, is at its best when separated from the body, noting that, "indeed the soul reasons best when [...] it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible and having no contact or association with it in its search for reality" (Plato "Phaedo" 102). Again, the soul's function is defined here as the ability to reason, which is harmful for those who

reason in far different ways than the general population. Following that, Plato writes about the soul being best apart from the body. This disconnect of the body from the essence of human beings not only is harmful in that it makes light of the experiences and reality that humans live particularly because of their body, but also in that it denies the right to connect any positive attributes of what it means to be human with the body. Even the ways in which Plato writes of the body perpetuate this negative connection to bodily reality as he notes, “The body keeps us busy in a thousand ways because of its need for nurture... It fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense, so that, as it is said, in truth and in fact no thought of any kind ever comes to us from the body. Only the body and its desires cause war, civil discord, and battles,” (Plato “Phaedo” 103). This negative assumption of bodies furthers the ideology that they are unimportant to the human condition and, even more than that, harmful to what it truly means to be human. When people accept these notions currently without considering another way of thinking, this harm ends up impacting individual people and the way they understand not only their own bodies, but also the body of everyone around them. If bodies are unimportant, then the bodies in positions of power can be taken as “normal” and the experiences of those with bodies that differ in any way can be even further oppressed, specifically because their lived reality based on their particular body is thus unimportant. Disabled people often have to be more aware of their body and the way that it functions, adapts, and ultimately impacts their reality, and so assuming that the body is only distracting from what it means to be human, denigrates the Disabled experience in a multitude of ways.

Both Plato and Aristotle further this harmful rhetoric by asserting that their ideas are not merely theories but natural occurrences, which leads people to make these assumptions without questioning it today. As Plato says in *The Republic* when discussing values, “justice is one of

that highest class of goods which are desired indeed for their result but in a far greater degree for their own sakes, like sight or hearing or knowledge or health or any other real and natural and not merely conventional good,” (Plato “Republic” 1:36:45-1:37:27). While this is an assertion about the concept of justice, it is rooted in deeply problematic, ableist assumptions. Deeming “sight or hearing or knowledge or health” as “real and natural and not merely conventional” as well as being desired “for their own sakes” creates the idea that if these traits are not present in an individual, then not only is their body less than ideal, but it is also going directly against what is “natural.” As it turns out, though, these are in fact beliefs that specific philosophers hold, and are not the definition of what is good, natural, and real. Theologian and philosopher Sharon Betcher notes the issue with understanding Plato in these ways, stating, “Although for ancient Platonism, the ideal was not considered humanly achievable, but was ascribed to the gods alone, the ideal has now become the expected standard of and for public performance” (13%). Sadly, these ideas have been accepted as fact and furthered by leading philosophers and theologians as well as the general public currently and are now often used to further oppress the Disabled community on the basis of “natural occurrences” in a way that goes even further than the Platonic philosophy itself.

As further evidence for this, Aristotle makes a similar, yet more particular point that, “We state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these” (Aristotle “Nicomachean Ethics” 1098a13-14). Even just to assert the fact that there is a “function of [humanity]” is ultimately ableist in nature because it is implying that a body’s, and thus a person’s, primary reason for existence is to function and perform in some way instead of acknowledging that existence and relation in and of itself is humane. To take it further,

connecting this performance to a singular “rational principle” deems all other ways of thought and life “irrational,” which furthers the argument of these differences being “wrong”. Because these ideas have been adopted today, these issues are deeply rooted throughout governmental and societal structures and create disproportionate harm for Disabled bodies in those systems. This idea is taken even further when Aristotle makes the analogy that one should, “apply this doctrine in the case of the ‘parts’ of the living body. Suppose that the eye were the animal--sight would have been its Soul, for sight is the substance or essence of the eye which corresponds to the formula, but the eye being merely the matter of seeing when seeing is removed the eye is no longer an eye, except in name-- it is no more a real eye than the eye of a statue or of a painted figure. We must now extend our consideration from the parts to the whole living body; for what the departmental census is to the bodily part which is its organ, that the whole faculty of sense is to the whole sensitive body as such” (Aristotle “De Anima” 556). It must be acknowledged first that this concept is based on an inherently ableist metaphor that assumes the eyes of blind people are inherently working “wrong” or against what is “natural.” Aside from that, the claim itself asserts that a body is not a natural or full body without the use of senses or other physical and mental facilities that are assumed in this idea of what a body naturally is. When people, in that time and now, accept this and believe--even subconsciously--that if a body is not doing what it is “naturally” “supposed to” do, then the assumption is automatically that that body is not equal to a “full” body. So often, this is assumed by the general population now and taken to be the dominate way of understanding bodies, when it is ultimately harmful and needs to be reexamined. This is fundamentally opposed to the idea that every body being the way that it is (and not having the assumption that it should be “doing” anything) is the correct way for that particular body to be.

To further expand on the ways in which Plato and Aristotle create an ableist rhetoric, it is important to distinctly name chronic illness as a type of Disability. While both of them write harmfully on the topic of illness, Plato clearly believes that it as well opposes what he deems as natural to the body: "To produce health is to establish the elements in a body in the natural relation of dominating and being dominated by one another, while to cause disease is to bring it about that one rules or is ruled by the other contrary to nature" (Plato "Republic" 120). If this belief were not so readily accepted in current ideology, it would be blatantly obvious that disease is as natural, if not more natural, in fact than health. Here he writes that health is ultimately natural, and yet, given a moment of thought, it is evident today that it takes effort to "produce" health from the individual as well as the entire medical field. Yet this assumption that disease is not natural, is still strongly held when in reality if it were to be assumed that disease is a natural part of life, those who are faced with disease either temporarily or chronically would be much better served. If it is not clear, this in fact includes every single person (while applying more strongly to those with chronic illness) because at one time or another, everyone will encounter disease even for a short time, which is in fact a natural occurrence.

All of this fundamental ableist philosophy gives way to making claims about specific aspects of life that are directly harmful to Disabled people, not just in the ways that bodies are abstractly interpreted, but in the ways that people relate to each other and live their lives practically. Aristotle is nothing short of terrible when referring to Disabled people as "less than human," and if that is not enough, describing them as inherently monstrous. He states, "But some are not like any of their relatives, but are still akin to human beings while others are not at all like humans in their appearance, but rather like some monster. For whoever is not like his parents is in some way a monster because nature has in these cases wandered in some way from the

essential character. The first beginning of this is when a female was born instead of a male. [...] Monstrosity is not necessary for any reason or specific ends, but it is necessary by probability of accident—since its origin must be considered as residing here,” (Aristotle “De Anima” 679). Aside from the fact that referring to people whose bodies differ from their parents or the expected norm of a body as “monstrous” is an obviously deeply harmful assumption, there is much in this quotation that continues to less explicitly degrade Disabled bodies. Particularly, noting that the origin of a Disabled body (and female body, for that matter) is inherently an “accident,” directly assumes that there is something wrong in that difference. While it is rare for someone currently agree with the Aristotelian assumption that the origin of a female body is “by probability of accident”, it is still widely assumed that a child being born different from their parent due to a disability is an accident, or along that same line, a misfortune and malfunction. When people continue to ignorantly accept Aristotle’s beliefs regarding what is “natural” or “normal”, then it is clear how in current times, people reach the same point as Aristotle when it comes to approaching Disabled people. This understanding that Aristotle presents cannot continue to be the way that people think about Disability, or the connection between the Disabled body and monstrosity will continue to be made as well.

Clearly, Plato and Aristotle, two of the most influential philosophers in the West, if not the world, had an incredibly specific and harmful idea about what a human being was supposed to be, all the way down to how they should look, act, exist, and ultimately be embodied. This understanding of an ideal body and separation of body from person, is still deeply prevalent, as are many Platonic and Aristotelian concepts, in the ways that people think about humanity, today. More than that, even, these beliefs deeply invade how people understand their Christian

beliefs as they relate both to how to exist as a human being as well as how Christ was, and is, embodied.

What Disability theologians note, though, is that Jesus of Nazareth does not play by Platonic rules. Christ's body was never understood to meet the Platonic ideal. This is specifically most explicit in Jesus as he is post-resurrection. What many people would call the foundational book of Disability Theology, *The Disabled God* by Nancy Eiesland, powerfully points to the ways that Christ pushes against this Platonic idealization of body and body soul dualism. She notes this directly, writing, "In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the Disabled God.... The Disabled God is not only the one from Heaven but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability," (Eiesland 100). Christ resurrected with wounds. This not only means, as Eiesland put it, that he was the Disabled God, but it also meant that he, in fact, as the marker for a perfect human, allowed for bodies of all kinds to be understood as good, full, and whole.

It is also deeply important to note at a very basic level that Jesus Christ resurrected with a body. In the modern age, Christians have tended to fully embrace Platonic body soul dualism when understanding resurrection as it relates to Christ, as well as the resurrection that is promised eschatologically. This leads people to think, what has become dominant, that when we are at the resurrection, our bodies will fall away and we will be left as souls, or, that if we have bodies, we will have a "new body" that is completely different from our current one and rather soul-like. However, in the one example of resurrection we have, Christ is resurrected with the wounds of his crucifixion, the physical makings of what happened in his life and to him, as a body. He is not changed to some other time of his body or some body that looks like his but

perfectly fits the Platonic ideal. Instead, he is resurrected with a glorified version of his own body with everything that it was in life still present. This means that while Christians often push away from the body in order to focus on the soul that will be in heaven, what they are missing is that Christ ascended into heaven as a body with wounds. This makes the body particularly important in an eschatological framework. Theologians Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, who write about the Eucharist note this significance of the body as it relates to Christ's resurrection, stating that, "Participating in this resurrection experience in fragmentary ways leads us not beyond this world in which bodies are subjugated to violence through systemic terror, malnutrition, and hunger. Rather, the opposite is the case: body realities and food politics move to the center," (Bieler and Schottroff 2%). Bodies are important not despite Christ resurrecting, but because Christ resurrected. This is deeply true especially for bodies that are, as these two theologians mention, faced with the deep realities of what it means to be a body. As Eiesland noted, this is particularly important for Disabled people because it is denouncing the Platonic ideal of a body and including Disabled people in the framework for a whole body. Further than that, it is important as it relates to eschatological hope and eternal life, because it takes the body and "move[s it] to the center".

Christ's resurrection therefore, pushes against ideas of body soul dualism. If Christ had in fact resurrected as a soul or soul-like being, there would have been ample evidence that when resurrection comes for humanity, it will leave the body behind. Clearly, though, this is not the case. As Christ resurrected as a body, so will we.

Disability theologians directly work with this fact and note that, in the case of Christ's resurrection, he is still wounded from the crucifixion. As Eiesland put it, Christ revealed to his disciples that he was the Disabled God and by doing this notes that "full personhood is fully

compatible with the experience of disability” (Eiesland 100). Christ is resurrected with what in modern terms would be considered an impairment or disability. Because this is fully affirming Disabled people as fully human within resurrection, it has eschatological meaning for Disabled bodies. To understand the resurrection of humanity, we are given the example of Jesus and it is clear that, ““Whatever concerns Christ’s death also concerns Christ’s resurrection, and the resurrection of all women and men and of the whole creation. We look at Christ’s death through the experience of his and our own resurrection [...]” (Bieler and Schottroff 25%). To understand life, and thus death, in relation to resurrection is deeply important as well as understanding Christ’s resurrection in relation to the resurrection of humanity. It is clear that the body that Christ lived as was apparent in his resurrection and that the scars that came with life and death were evident on his body. The fact that humanity’s resurrection is linked directly with the experience of Christ’s resurrection means that our bodies and the things that impact them in life and death will still be important and present eschatologically.

Due to the way that people are taught to think about disability, stemming from the beliefs of Plato and Aristotle, the idea of resurrecting as a Disabled body is not something that many Abled people want to believe in. In contrast, though, many Disabled people could not imagine even a reincarnated version of themselves without being Disabled because it is so foundationally part of who they are. As noted earlier, advocate Keah Brown feels deeply connected to her identity as a Disabled person stating, “I love my identifiers for this reason: because they are mine in every way, even when they mean that I am distancing myself from what is perceived to be normal,” (2:09:23-2:09:35). She finds this peace in her identifiers by being able to name them and relate to them as hers. This personal connection to them is a deeply positive aspect of her life and letting that go would let go of something that is hers and something that is core to who she

is. Along with Keah, in a more faith centered conversation, author Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha quotes activist Stacey Milbern who states, “My faith is a huge part of my resilience practice because it answers a lot of my questions. I know Disabled people are perfect as we are because I believe we were made by the same hand that made flowers and mice and dogs and stars, and they are perfect as they are. I know God wants us to strive for justice because God is love and justice is what love looks like in public (Cornell West)” (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 7:55:49- 7:56:08). Milbern deeply believed in this beautiful connection between Disabled identity and faith and pushed for a move against trying to change Disabled people, but, instead calls the Church to fight for justice alongside Disabled people. It’s impossible to read the many accounts of Disabled activists sharing about how central a Disabled identity is to their life and even their faith and think that they would hope for it to be gone in resurrection. Just as Milbern states, it is a part of God’s creation and an eschatological perfection of it will be justice for Disabled people, not erasure of them. This is not to discount many Disabled people who do wish and pray for a physical changing of their body after the resurrection, but it should leave people wondering if this wish is due to their embodied experience or to the social barriers they face. An embodied experience of disability, if understood with the Social Model, is only problematic in the face of injustice. Christ’s resurrection simultaneously promises the love of Disabled bodies and justice for them as they are, as he is.

In a beautiful conversation between theologian Karl Barth and a peer who was concerned about his own Disabled daughter’s resurrection life, Barth engages in powerful theology around this point. This conversation started with the fact that, “Vogel wanted to speak straightforwardly of a wholly new creative act of God, one in which the painful limitations of this life would be left behind. And he had deep personal reasons for doing so. His daughter was severally disabled, and

his theological commitments resonated with his wish as a father that there- in God's new creation- his daughter would be freed from present restriction: 'she will walk!' To which Barth replied, No. That makes it sound as if God has made a mistake in your daughter's case. One which He is obliged to put right. 'Is it not a much more beautiful and powerful hope,' Barth asked, 'that something becomes apparent there that at present we cannot understand at all- namely that this life was not futile, because it is not in vain that God has said to it: 'I have loved: you!''?' (Wood 70%). This may seem abrasive upon reading it for the first time. Surely, Vogel had good intentions and only wanted what was best for his daughter. But in true Barthian fashion, he had something much more broad and beautiful in mind. "I have loved: you" is fundamental to God's relationship with humanity and is true in every particularity of everyone's body. This account of God's love embraces particularity of disability and moves away from the Aristotelian idea that disability is an accident. Instead, "I have loved: you" applies to this child in her particularity because God loves her for all of who she is and understands none of her to be a misfortune. Barth is offering a powerful and expansive Disability Theology in a way that most people have not considered.

Further than this, even, is the understanding of what the pain of the cross and the pain of Disabled bodies means in relation to the resurrection. If Disabled people resurrect with their Disabled body, as Christ resurrected with wounds, then those of us who are in pain are led directly to the question of what happens to the pain that may be inherent to our Disabled or Chronically Ill body. Theologian James Cone works directly with the pain (emotional, spiritual, and physical) that Black people in America face, and evaluates that in regards to the cross and the hope of resurrection. He writes of the lives and deaths of Black people who are unjustly tortured and killed and theologically asserts that, "As in the resurrection of the Crucified One,

God could transmute defeat into triumph, ugliness into beauty, despair into hope, the cross into the resurrection” (Cone 46%). This idea of taking defeat, ugliness, despair, and ultimately the cross and redeeming them so fully to arrive at triumph, beauty, hope, and resurrection is central to the message of Jesus. Many people when faced with this question of pain do not address this redemptive nature well. To state that God would cause someone pain is theologically and practically problematic, but to imagine that God erases pain or suffering becomes problematic as well. If God could take it away and does not, then God may be doing something even worse than causing it by ignoring our suffering, and if God erases it, then we no longer have the experiences that have formed us and God is not engaging with every part of our lives, so those experiences never become redeemed. Instead God must fully recognize pain, engage directly with it, and ultimately redeem it. This is what happened so clearly in the cross and resurrection.

Redemption of pain is not simply removing it, but instead, fully engaging in it, just as ultimately Christ did in death. In order to redeem death, Christ died and was risen. Thus, even after death, which is a seemingly final point of pain and trauma, there is hope. This hope does not erase death, but comes directly through it, both in Christ’s death and in our death’s and each of their moves into resurrection. So redeeming pain must come directly connected to this specific pain as well. Elaine Scarry writes about the nature of pain, stating that, “Though indisputably real to the sufferer, it is, unless accompanied by visible body damage or a disease label, unreal to others. This profound ontological split is a doubling of pain’s annihilating power: the lack of acknowledgment and recognition (which if present could act as a form of self-extension) becomes a second form of negation and rejection, the social equivalent of the physical aversiveness” (Scarry 13%). Fundamental to pain is its inherent ability to disconnect a person from everyone around them. Pain cannot be described, shared, or commiserated in because of the

separateness of bodies. Understanding this in regard to resurrection, though, means something completely different. Heaven is a fullness of love and relation, and so when pain means a fundamental disconnect from other people, the redemption that resurrection brings is a full deconstruction of what pain is. When community, love, and justice are fulfilled after the resurrection, pain will not be erased but be entangled in love and understanding that breaks it apart at its root. Christ's solidarity with humanity when on the cross gives proof that God enters into pain and redeems it not by dismissing it, but by understanding and going through it along with us.

Central to Cone's theology is the idea that, "God transformed lynched black bodies into the recrucified body of Christ. Every time a white mob lynched a black person, they lynched Jesus" (Cone 95%). Christ was crucified, resurrected, and then "recrucified" at every lynching. This means that after Christ resurrected, pain did not disappear, but Christ continued to enter into pain with us. After resurrection, Christ's wounds were still there and Christ was still with those who were in pain, redeeming the fundamental logic of pain that disconnects people from each other. Christ is with us in pain. God does not erase pain, just like God does not erase death, but redeems it by joining us in it. After we are resurrected, pain will be understood, be covered in love, and be fully redeemed. Those moments where all we long for is that someone would understand the pain we are feeling will not be in vain. There will not be an erasure of our experience or identities in order to "belong" in Heaven. Instead, God moves with us through the pain in order to fully redeem it and be in it with us, redeeming what pain means so that we can be fully included as our whole selves with God eschatologically. This is good news in which we are welcomed and saved into.

Whether or not pain is related to the experience of a Disabled person, it is important to note, as Barth made so clear, that Disabled people's lives, identities, and experiences will not be erased eschatologically. All too often, the church does not recognize this hope. There is a mainstream understanding that disabilities will disappear in heaven, because of the negative ableist ways that disability is thought about. I personally encountered this as I made my way through church as a child. Most apparently, I remember this being abundantly clear in a particular moment while I was in the middle school confirmation program myself. I, unlike Riley, had an adult leader, who was the mother of my best friend who was also in our group. My leader also happened to work at the church. There were four of us seventh grade girls in my group and one weekend, for a bonding event, we went to the movies to watch the new film *Heaven Is For Real*. While the scope of this paper does not explore in depth what is meant when one says "heaven" the ideas of eschatology in general are evident in this story. As middle school girls, we all had a picture of what that meant in our minds, though, and we had all been told by many other church members about how this film was about a young boy who died in surgery and was brought back to life, but while he was in surgery, he had gone to Heaven. Later, much controversy surrounded the film, and many people now believe that the whole story was fabricated for profit. Regardless of the validity of the family's claim, though, the memory of us watching it is etched in my mind forever.

During the film, someone notes that "there are no more glasses in heaven," subtly implying that all disability just goes away. At the time, my vision was very different, and while many people would have said otherwise, I did not identify as Disabled at all. But somehow, I knew that statement held more weight for me than it did for the other girl in our group who had

glasses. The other three girls knew that, too, and I remember as we were coming out of the theater how the four of us were giddy with excitement that I would be healed in heaven.

This seems like it may be a beautiful and hopeful story, but there are implications that go further than I'm sure any of us realized that day. First of all, as a seventh-grade girl, I was deeply aware that my vision made me different, and this continued to perpetuate that it was not in a good way. All of my closest friends were there, being so excited that this part of me would finally go away and that, even if I had to wait until heaven, I'd finally be "better" and "whole". Aside from disability, I doubt that there would be a single aspect of a seventh grader's identity that even adults would be so willing to wish away, and that in itself is incredibly harmful. More than that, though, this was one moment in particular that, gathered with many memories of people inappropriately praying for me and telling me about the sins I must have committed or the demons living in my eyes, that cemented in me the belief that there was something inherently wrong with me, that I was somehow less in God's image than the rest of myabled family and friends, and that I would not be welcomed into God's presence the way that I was. Years later, I read the theology of Nancy Eiesland, Sharon Betcher, Kathy Black, and Amos Yong, among others, and learned that Christ ascended into heaven in a wounded body, and that profoundly changed my life. While it is still challenging to fully disregard all of the disability-negative theology I have encountered, it is beautiful to know that Christ welcomes me in his presence just as I am.

It is hard to put all of the negative theology behind me, when reading mainstream theologians I love and noting the ways that they further these ableist beliefs. For example, I have treasured and learned from the many incredibly powerful works of theologian Henri Nouwen, and yet, reading his book *Adam*, which recounts his time spent with an intellectually Disabled

man named Adam who Nouwen lived with and supported, was one of the hardest books for me to read. Knowing so well the theology of Christ as the Disabled God and loving the ways that Heaven was reimagined more accurately to be fully just and accommodating to Disabled people, reading Nouwen's book saddened me in that it reverted back to incredibly ableist theology that I had been familiar with in the past. Particularly, Nouwen notes as it relates to Adam's resurrection that, "I really hope that God is going to give Adam a new body, so that he can walk all around in heaven and speak and talk with his grandpa and grandma and his uncle, who are already there" (Nouwen 81%). Here, Nouwen makes it abundantly clear that Adam's "old body" was not as "good" as his "new" one will be because it will get to do the things that Adam could not. This theology automatically assumes that Adam was lacking in his life on earth and that Christ would want him to be different. Adam lived his life the way that he did because of his disability, knew and loved the people he did because of his disability, and related to people and the world in a particular way because of his disability. To take that disability away would make Adam completely different and erase that part of who he was that impacted so much of his life and identity. Who is to say if Adam liked this part of who he was or not, but it is clear that on some level, Nouwen, who provided care for him for so long, seemed to wish he was different instead of embracing who God made him to be.

Taking that further while looking at Adam's dead body lying in a casket, Nouwen writes, "Here he looked so healthy, so whole, so handsome that I couldn't keep my eyes off him. It was as if he was already giving me a glimpse of the new body he would have in the resurrection," (83%). Nouwen was looking at the dead body of his friend and saying that the body was as "whole" "healthy" and "handsome" as it had ever been. In case it is not clear, there is a deep problem with theology that would lead someone to believe that someone was the most whole,

healthy, and handsome they have ever been while looking into their casket. While Nouwen does amazing theological work in other areas, reading his words about Adam is deeply disheartening and shows the clear lack of worth that theologians associate with Disabled bodies and therefore people.

As noted earlier, though, with a further understanding of disability and theology and their intersection, this theology is both harmful and incorrect. Christ was Disabled and is God and is with God currently. The powerful Blind theologian John Hull writes in his article about the importance of understanding theology of resurrection in this way by noting that, “There are considerable advantages for a Christian theology of disability when the Christian doctrine of the person takes as its starting point not the image of God but the broken body of Christ. This starting point leads us away from aspects of Christian tradition which tend to marginalize Disabled people for those which emphasize disability as an alternative theology to the theology of perfection and power” (Hull). Understanding resurrection this way first and foremost is not only inclusive, but deeply and correctly affirming of the Disabled body. Along with that, it is clearly also helpful for the Church as a whole in understanding theology and Christ’s life and resurrection in general.

Disability theologian Amos Yong notes the importance of this clearly when his book, “turns, fittingly, toward eschatological matters related to the doctrine of the resurrection and our beliefs regarding the afterlife. This involves a retrieval of various New Testament witnesses regarding the incarnational and resurrection life of Christ to see how a disability hermeneutic provides a "disability-friendly" Christology, and a reexamination of the question of salvation, both presently and eschatologically, to see how it appears from a disability perspective. This is important because our understanding of salvation and even the afterlife shapes how we live our

lives here and now” (Yong 11%). It is deeply evident that the way that Nouwen and my fellow middle schoolers thought about resurrection and the afterlife did in fact affect the way that they lived, and at the same time, it is clear how theologians like Yong, Hull, and Barth act differently towards Disabled people and likely all people with their own understandings about resurrection and the life to come.

Understanding Christ’s body to be important after the resurrection, and with that to be wounded and Disabled, creates a powerful way to live and experience life, theology, and each other. Focusing on Christ, is to note that he is the one to pray “Our Father, Mother, God, who art in Heaven” and to also be the one in Heaven right now after the resurrection and ascension as a body, and a Disabled body at that. This is foundational to Disability theology not only in that it is a point that cannot go unrecognized, but also that it is something that should be the focal point of all disability theology to follow, because our understanding of resurrection does in fact, as Yong put it, impact “how we live our lives here and now”. Our Father, Mother, God who art in Heaven, the one who Christ is praying to, is one, with Christ--the Disabled God.

Thy Table Come Thy Will Be Done On Earth as it is in Heaven

Christ ascending into Heaven with a Disabled body as the Disabled God leads us to think about what Heaven is in a radically different way. To pray, “on Earth as it is in Heaven” will mean something very different if Heaven is in fact encompassing the presence of God in which Christ still has wounds. Christ is still faithfully sitting at God’s right hand in Heaven and is in that position fully as himself, wounds and all, because he resurrected that way and is currently in that resurrected state. This reality urges me to think of God’s community as a table, and not a kingdom, but this will be better addressed further after understanding more fully why Christ’s Disabled body impacts the fullness of this statement so profoundly.

Presently, in the minds of most people, thinking about what Heaven means for Disabled people takes them directly to platonic ideals of a “perfect” body, as defined by Plato and inhabited by current culture. Yet to understand Heaven with Disabled people and the Disabled God in mind encourages a radical new understanding of what being in in God’s presence means for all of us.

When we pray “on Earth as it is in Heaven”, we need to understand that whatever “Heaven” means includes Christ’s Disabled body. As previously noted, when attempting to understand the connection of resurrection, Christ, and the Disabled body, it is helpful to remember “Whatever concerns Christ’s death also concerns Christ’s resurrection, and the resurrection of all women and men and of the whole creation. We look at Christ’s death through the experience of his and our own resurrection [...]” (Bieler and Schattroff 25%).

Current Disability Theology relies on this concept in clearly noting that if Christ’s resurrection is

related to his wounded body, then the resurrection of all humanity will include Disabled bodies too. If Christ is in Heaven as God as a Disabled body, then all bodies of the like will be welcomed in Heaven and in God's presence as they are. Disabled people should not be written out of Heaven, nor should there be an erasure of their lives and experiences by assuming that they will have to change to enter the full presence of God.

Coming to the conclusion that Disabled people will in fact be present, and more than that, gladly welcomed, eschatologically, challenges people to embrace communion with God in a way that brings love and justice to the lives of Disabled people and the world. To understand my life, as well as many Disabled people's lives, in connection to that radical love and justice does not mean erasing disability from life. Instead, we are called to embrace disability as part of the definition of humanity and life and bring justice, not erasure, to all Disabled people, as is promised to all people, eschatologically.

One day, a few years ago, when I first started contemplating how disability and resurrection were linked, I fearfully asked my professor the question "what would resurrection mean for *me* and *my* body?" In reply, I was asked what it would mean for me in relation to my disability and my body to be surrounded only by God's perfect and radical love. For a long time after that conversation, I privately questioned if that love would get rid of that part of my body, but that felt as if part of who I was and something that impacted almost all of how I lived would just be disregarded, and that did not feel like love for me -- for all of who I am. That didn't feel hopeful.

As I thought more deeply, the answer that I realized for myself and that is clear in many other Disabled people's preferences is not to remove disability, but to be loved and cared for

specifically with disability in mind – to be loved for *all* of who we are. I have not forgotten the joy that this question and answer brought me, because it did not erase part of who I was, but instead brought a hope for the ways that I could be fully and completely loved for who I am. As I thought about it in the last few years, I have shared it with many Disabled people, and that idea has brought nearly all of us to tears. The idea of being loved for every part of us was radical and brought a glimpse of resurrection before us even then. Christ loved with a radical love and justice that embraced every part of everyone he came in contact with, and God in Heaven would do the same. Encountering justice and love for Disabled people eschatologically seems more like resurrection than erasing that part of who we are.

As prominent and prophetic Disabled theologian, Sharon Betcher, writes, “A review of historical, biblical, and secondary literature suggests that modern realism, inserting our values of cure to normalcy and longevity as affected by Spirit, overwrote the strands of earlier Christianity’s relations to suffering. Miracles, like Ezekiel’s scripting of the resurrection of bodies had more to do with the overcoming of sociopolitical, economic colonizing conditions affecting body-psyches and social communities,” (Betcher 59%). This sociopolitical, economic, and body centered change is deeply rooted in the hope of disability justice now and eschatologically. It will take two, if not more, major shifts in the understanding of humanity and Christianity to bring this change about. First of all, people must understand, as the beginning of this project asserts, that disability is not inherently negative, but instead a profoundly meaningful aspect of identity mirrored in Christ. Secondly, humanity in general and the Church as a whole needs to shift in a way that amplifies Disabled identity, and more than just assuming it is not negative, it needs to embrace a more open approach to integrating disability justice so that this justice can

positively impact everyone's life and theology and community as a whole. This second move is what Betcher and other disability theologians call for when explaining the deep need for justice now that will be a taste of what will come eschatologically for the Disabled community and all people. As Betcher notes, this means moving far past the platonic ideals of "normalcy" and entering into justice practices that benefit everyone, most explicitly Disabled bodies.

This is precisely why I chose to understand this passage of the prayer as metaphor of a table instead of a Kingdom. Ultimately, to integrate disability justice, community needs to be defined in a way that works for all people, and that first and foremost means changes in the understanding, the imagination, and assumptions of everyone. Judith Heumann, possibly the most impactful person in the Disability Rights movement in America, notes that, "Disability culture is really just a term for a culture that has learned to value the humanity in all people, without dismissing anyone for looking, thinking, believing, or acting differently" (Heumann 48:45-48:59). This is a powerful and hopeful point and understanding it to be the root of disability justice means that we are called to create a space in which all of people's particularities are not only accepted but welcomed for what they individually can and will bring to the table because of the uniqueness of who they are. This is particularly challenging in a culture and with a Church universal that understands life and bodies in one specific way to often be superior. This is why Disability Justice has to be directly opposed to Kingdoms that hold up the standard of specific bodily ability and production. There is a list, from Sins Invalid of 10 disability justice principals, and one of them is directly related to this, stating that disability justice is dependent on an, "Anti-capitalism politic" because "in economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming

body/minds” (Sins Invalid). To be Disabled is to be anti-capitalist specifically for this reason. That our bodies/minds do not fit in to the capitalist system and we cannot receive justice through it or through trust in systems created for bodies unlike ours in any way. This is why I deliberately choose to eliminate the word kingdom, a social structure that Disabled bodies often, if not always, are marginalized in, and replace it with table, because a table can be metaphorically and physically fully accessible, whereas a kingdom cannot. “Thy table comes” hopes to push first to understanding new non-hierarchical ways of thinking about God’s promises in general, and ultimately to relate even this part of Christ’s prayer to the hope of eschatological and current justice for Disabled people in a way that Christ himself worked towards.

I chose intentionally to focus on this particular word choice in order to move away from rigid descriptions of how to treat or not treat Disabled people, and instead exemplify a small yet significant way of doing it in my own writing to be mirrored in all practices. In the same way, here it is important to understand the Disability Justice movement in order to understand how to focus on justice theologically. Yet instead of giving an overview of the history that can be easily researched I will instead tell a story of a moment in that history to set an example for what the rest of the movement and our lives should follow. While I was not present at these events, it feels much like other personal stories I have told because of the effect it has had on my life and the ways I feel connected to it through members of my community.

The story starts with Judith Heumann who was quoted above, and who was, in the 1970’s and presently, helping to lead the disability rights movement. That year, Disability rights activists were fighting to get Cabinet Member Joseph Califano to sign section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act, which would be the first major legislation giving rights to Disabled people in America. Heumann along with many others had led multiple other protests up until this point, but when they realized that this would be another, she noted that, “It was an ‘over my dead body’ kind of thing. So, quietly, we had decided to take our protest one step further” (Heumann 41%). They in fact took it significantly further and staged the longest sit-in occupying a government building in American history. They were joined by several groups across the country to do the same, although the one that Heumann led in San Francisco lasted the longest and went for 28 days.

Because many people have not heard of the 504 sit-ins, learning about the occupation of a government building may likely bring up memories of the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection at the capitol. While both were protests taking place in government buildings, that is where the similarities end. These two events are very importantly different from each other, and to people in 2021 and beyond, noting these differences is deeply important. While Heumann and others were actively advocating for change, they were not trying to overthrow the people in power. They were also, very clearly, fighting for inclusion of individuals, whereas the insurrectionists were attempting to take over in order to uphold values of exclusion of many different people. Most fundamentally, though, the 504 sit-ins were in order to pass a law that would help end violence and discrimination towards Disabled people, and the insurrection this year ended in several deaths. Disability advocates, in contrast were fighting for an equal chance at life. In thinking of the insurrection, many Christians are reminded of the theological implications it held. The images and descriptions of people raising “Jesus Saves” flags and praying in the capitol, while bringing actual death and destruction created a deeply confusing

and harmful connection. Understanding the 504 sit-in's theologically brings quite the opposite understanding. Disabled people and allies celebrated Easter and Passover during their time in the building, supported each other, and extended grace and love to those around them as well as those who they were pushing against to get the law passed. There was no violence and a strong commitment to love and justice, whereas January 6<sup>th</sup> brought with it if nothing else a destructive and deadly inversion of these important civil rights movements.

To understand the full theological significance of the 504 sit-in's, it is important to evaluate what they consisted of and in what way they were engaged. Heumann describes the start of these 28 days, writing, "I turned and headed for the entrance to the Federal Building. It was instant mayhem. People surged behind me. Those who could walk went up the steps. Blind people pushed people in manual wheelchairs, the person in the wheelchair navigating. The people in electric chairs drove themselves up the ramp to the right of the steps. Inside, people mobbed the atrium of the building. Someone pushed the button for the elevator. It was immediately crammed with people" (Heumann 44%). Even here, it is clear that there is a thoughtfulness, love, and inclusion happening. This initiation to the protest was deeply powerful due to the amount of people, the persistence and depth of their desire for the 504 to be signed, and their communal solidarity. Even at this point in the sit-in, each person was using their skills and abilities in ways that made it possible for everyone to be part of the protest in a way that worked for them. They were essentially living out what their hope was for this new law and their dream of Disability Justice as a whole. The entire sit-in consisted of this attitude of community care, accommodation, and love and acceptance for all people. The leaders of the sit-in knew that this community aspect was deeply important to keeping their protest going and

“were sure that the only way to maintain the group was to create an overwhelming sense of unity—and the only way to do that was to be totally inclusive and completely open. We waited until every single person had arrived and the sign language interpreters were ready to start translating” (Heumann 52%). Every night they held one of these conversations with every person that was present, which, for the majority of the time, was 110 people. They made sure that there was access to sign language, that people were given time to speak even when their speech was slower, and would sometimes be up until early morning listening to the thoughts and comments of every person present.

On top of that, for the 28 days that they stayed there, their job included caring for the community gathered in other ways too, many of which were things they hoped for in the world as a whole. Heumann noted that, “For people with disabilities, a sleepover is not as simple as tossing some sandwiches and a toothbrush into a backpack. In addition to personal assistance, a fairly high number of us also require various types of daily medications and have things like catheters that need to be changed, or the need to get turned at night to avoid bedsores. Many people, of course, had come without a personal attendant, any kind of food, or even a toothbrush” (Heumann 46%). This made it so that part of the goal of the leaders was to find ways that every person could be included in caring for everyone else, fully embodying the practice of collective care. It is beautiful to think that this small community gathered for almost a month was living out the life they desired their actions to create.

One of the most powerful parts of this story, though, comes from the way that this not only worked out for them, but ultimately was the only reason that they could stay there longer than any one has before. After a short time of their protest, the government shut the building

down completely and would not allow anyone or anything to enter. This would have been a problem more generally because there was no access to food, and also more particularly as Heumann noted because the people staying there needed medication and equipment that had to come from the outside. Instead of giving up, as many groups would have had to do, they were able to move forward specifically because they were Disabled. This was a powerful moment because as Heumann explains, "Then it occurred to us. We had a secret weapon. Sign language. We decided to give our announcements and messages to the Deaf protesters, who took them to the windows looking out on the plaza, where our supporters were holding the vigil. When they got the attention of the Deaf protesters and sign language interpreters outside, they signed our messages through the window. The Deaf protesters and sign language interpreters then relayed the messages to the right people. It was beautiful" (Heumann 53%). They were able to communicate to the people they had to, and they eventually got food, medication, and supplies up to them specifically because they had this culture surrounding them. The benefits of it were evident for them, and they knew that the work they were doing to get Disabled people and culture more present in society was going to be just as beneficial. With all of this in place, they were eventually able to meet their goal of getting the 504 signed unchanged and provide something that was life changing for so many people. It was, in fact, incredibly beautiful how they were able to do this, and shows in many ways how beautiful communities would be now, if everyone were cared for and was able to care for others in ways that worked for them. This concept of Disability justice, solidarity, care, and ultimately love is what these civil rights leaders were striving for, and fundamentally what Disability rights advocates are still fighting for today.

To bring this sort of communal love, solidarity, and justice into the church is what I am calling for in this paper. Noting the ways that for that small, but life-changing 28 day period, these acts of care were so deeply impactful, it is clear that if they were integrated more broadly into the Church then the community of believers would all benefit and Christ's love would be more deeply extended to every person, Disabled or otherwise.

If we are attempting to make God's table come, then there is deep need for this exact type of justice and care in the world that will mirror the power of inclusion and love that will be present eschatologically. As noted earlier, Disabled people's presence in Heaven is a clear part of the resurrection, and now it is clear how their presence will bring love and community that is found directly in the image of God. Disabled people are not only welcomed eschatologically, but their presence will bring the fullness of God's heart to God's people. To pray "thy table come" and "thy will be done" gives something inherently meaningful for Disabled people and the recognition of that on earth today will bring love and justice straight from the table of God. I pray that this love and justice that the Disability rights movement pushes for and that Christ extends to Disabled people on earth will continue to come in floods and that it will be on earth as it is in Heaven.

## Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

The Lord's Prayer, as noted previously, is deeply connected to the embodied human experience, and this section may be related to that even more firmly and practically than the rest. While thinking about the Lord's Prayer, it is important to keep in mind the embodied God standing on the mountain side, preaching to humans experiencing the fullness of their embodiment. Today, with the help of Platonic philosophy and modern technology, many, but not all, people are pulled as far away from that embodied experience as they can be. We are encouraged to not only imagine our souls and minds disconnected from our body, but also our ability to think, work, live purposefully is put in direct contrast to the "limits" of our body. In reality, to find the love, justice, and hope that Christ is alluding to in this prayer and in his life, we are called to recognize the fullness of ourselves and of him as embodied human beings.

This "Daily Bread" piece of the prayer so often gets disconnected from our embodiment, as does the rest of our lives and needs. While it is potentially most important that a prayer for daily bread does in fact mean a prayer for food and nourishment of all bodies, there is also an importance to understanding more broadly how it connects to Christ's life. Instead of understanding daily bread as a metaphor for something more spiritual and less embodied, there is a deep power in extending daily bread out from what it is – the need to be fed – into a more general prayer for embodied need as a whole. This does not discount that daily bread is necessary for people to live, but instead hopes to focus on the many fundamental needs for human beings to live as embodied people.

To understand this portion of the prayer in depth, exploring what it means to be embodied is crucial. More broadly than that, even, it is important to understand what it means to be embodied in order to understand the fullness of every aspect of the Lord's Prayer and Christian doctrine, from "on earth as it is in heaven" and "daily bread" to ideas of the Body of Christ as Church gathering and Eucharist. Fundamentally, because Christ is human and human beings are in relation with God, there is reason to understand every aspect of Christianity through an embodied understanding.

There has been much work focused on what it means to live as a body in relation to other bodies and to experience humanity in its fullness of being. To understand this concept fully, giving attention to the work of Judith Butler and her ideas around social ontology are critical. Her work as a philosopher takes on many different ideas, all of which are connected to her understanding of what it means to be human. In her recent book, *The Force of Nonviolence*, Butler gives an in depth account of her ideas on ontology and embodiment. Her analysis of the self seems to stem from the question, "If one's self is vitally connected to a set of others and cannot be conceived without them, then when and where does that singular self start and end?" (Butler 26:24-27:31). This question is not only valid, but affirming of the ways that it is necessary to live life connected to others, when the current culture is so focused on isolating individual selves. She challenges the ideas of individualization that many people default to when thinking about what it means to exist, and it is that particular challenge that feels so necessary to the work of Disability Theology. To explain this idea of embodiment, she writes, "No body can sustain itself on its own. The body is not and never was a self-subsisting kind of being, which is but one reason the metaphysics of substance which conceives the body as an extended being with discrete boundaries was never a particularly good frame for understanding what a body is. The

body is given over to others in order to persist” (Butler 1:23:22-1:23:49). This is deeply true, and while current ideals of independence and self-promotion attempt to deny it, when faced directly with the dependance that is so engrained in embodiment, it is clear that Butler’s point is directly connected to what it means to be human. This interconnectedness is evident in the way that all people must function to persist.

Taking these ideas further, Butler does not assert that we are sadly constrained to community living, but instead, she writes about the ways in which this connection to others is significantly formative of the fullness of who we are. There is no denying in her arguments and in our lives that, “In other words, we can assert in a general way that social interdependency characterizes life” (Butler 27:51-28:15). To understand Christ as embodied and sharing the Lord’s prayer, as well as to understand what all people need and what Disability Justice strives for, understanding this direct fact of embodiment is fundamentally important. There is no life without social interdependency, so instead of attempting to deny that as a culture full of capitalist and Social Darwinian ideals of everyone for themselves fighting for an individual place at the top, humanity should be working to understand the fullness of interdependency and how leaning into it well can benefit all of us. Butler writes about what constitutes a self, how radical interdependency is the sustainer of all human life, and how denial of that only furthers injustice. She addresses her readers, almost with a call to action when noting that, “a new idea of equality can only emerge from a more fully imagined interdependency: an imagining that unfolds in practices and institutions, in new forms of civil and political life” (Butler 1:15:33-1:15:46). Her work continuously leaves her readers with the notion and hope that we can create something better. To bring justice, equality, connectedness, and ultimately love was the foundation of Christ’s life as well as, when done prophetically, the work of both the Disability Justice

movement and theology as a whole. To focus on love through a mindset of interconnectedness and interdependence is what Butler calls in order to bring a better world, and it is the same call that theology and Disability activists are making. Yet, those calls, more often than not, fail to be linked together.

Understanding humanity and embodiment to mean this sense of interconnectedness is a profound and helpful theological idea. If daily bread is a call for the meeting of embodied need, then this need for interconnectedness is something that Christians should be praying for and working toward. Daily bread is not only metaphorically consistent with this idea of interdependence as bodily need, but it in fact proves this theologically. When a person is eating the Eucharistic meal, or any meal for that matter, they are engaging in a web of interdependence. Even in the taking of the bread and wine in a church communion setting connects us to an entire web of people. Not only is bread in this context connecting us with God, but it is also connecting us with a lineage of people behind us, ahead of us, and even adjacent to us who have been and are taking communion in other times and contexts. We are not isolated, and that is important theologically and practically to the meaning of the Eucharist.

Even further, daily bread consists of more general meals that sustain life, but these meals cannot happen alone. In order to be eating bread, there were people who worked to provide each of the ingredients, people who worked them together in order to make the bread, people who transported the ingredients and the bread once it was made, and others who may have supplied, stocked, or sold it at the store. If it is in the context of communion, there are also people who prepared it, blessed it, and served it, all of whom are, in turn, connected to a web of others. These all give evidence to the fact that we are not, and cannot, be alone. In addition, ingredients come from the earth, the earth is affected by the transportation, cooking, and use of the food, and the

earth is impacted by the stores, farms, houses, and churches these things take place in. Just in order to engage with bread, we are tied up in a web of interconnectedness with the world around us and with humanity. This interdependence is not beside the point when Christians talk about daily bread, but is precisely the point. The dependence on food, the world, and our neighbor links us to each other, our own bodies, earth, and God in profound and life changing ways.

Because Disabled people are often in tune with embodiment and embodied need when it comes to this sort of interdependence, the Church can consider their work in order to better answer this call of Christ. In the writings of Disabled activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha there is deep evidence of this call for interdependence in order to create a more just world and ultimately, to meet the embodied need that she knows well. She, as well as many other Disability advocates, describe this form of equality from interdependence as collective care. Piepzna-Samarasinha describes the Disability Justice principal of collective care, as a, “shift in ideas of access and care whether it’s disability, child care, economic access or many more from an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that is maybe even deeply joyful” (Piepzna-Samarasinha 37:28- 37:42). This joy seems deeply rooted in the call of Christ to love thy neighbor. When care shifts from an individual, unfortunate task, and becomes a communal act of love, everyone benefits. This idea is one of the founding principles of the Disability Justice movement and is vital for all of humanity to live as embodied people well because it meets the specific need in a way that is not only practical, but beautiful.

As noted previously, the 504 sit ins were one of many places where Disabled people cared for each other well and not only met needs of individuals but met the needs of embodied connectedness. In the telling of this story, Heumann writes, “But despite the discomfort, people

began to have fun. They raced their wheelchairs in the halls, organized games, played the guitar and sang songs. There was almost no privacy. Everyone was getting dressed and taking care of whatever they needed to do in the middle of everything, and they were bonding. They sat in small circles for hours, talking and talking. Friendships formed” (Heumann 56%). This is a clear story of exactly what community care was defined as earlier. The love and joy that came out of meeting each others’ needs and the need for connectedness among everyone fulfilled the lives of the people present. Not only was this a story of care, but it was also a story of joy, community, and meeting needs.

This sort of care and community is worked into the lives of Disabled people when they choose to live into their community and the ideas of collective care. Personally, I did not find this until moving to college. In childhood, I was surrounded with mostly Abled people or people who hid their disability. However, when I moved to college, I eventually connected with a few other Disabled students like myself. We did not name it until recently, but as we got closer, we started living in a web of really meaningful collective care. As we did life together, we took on each other’s needs in really beautiful ways.

Practically, we all took care of each other. Eventually, two of them became my roommates and two of my closest friends. The two of them knew that flashing and colored lights caused me pain, and so if there was an event in the center of school with additional “fun” lighting or if, as happened frequently, a light in the cafeteria was almost out and blinking excessively, they would text me so I could avoid those places. One of my friends had a condition that made her have severe reactions to smells. If she inhaled perfume, scented candles, or strong laundry detergent, in addition to other artificial smells, she would have reactions that ranged from rashes to anaphylaxis. We would often send a text when a room on campus was just

cleaned with strong smelling cleaning supplies and we would all use unscented supplies in our rooms and lives. The three of us each had particular needs like this that showed up in many moments, and it became completely natural for us to integrate our lives in a way that we barely noticed these accommodations for each other. We found deep joy in the closeness of our friendships and we knew each other better and in ways that we had not experienced before. We were just friends from the outside, but our friendships were so much richer because we incorporated not only each other's needs, but also each other's joys, challenges, passions, and life in with our own. It was beautiful and most definitely "deeply joyful".

While this is an incredibly important theme in Disability history and culture, I believe it is also a prevalent theme in the Bible and in Christ's life. Christians are called to be the Body of Christ, but this collective care that is present in Disabled communities gets pushed aside as irrelevant or too challenging in many church spaces. The Christian community can learn a lot from the way in which Disabled people enter into rhythms of this care. Paul refers to the Church as the "Body of Christ" specifically because of the community that is required in it. The Body of Christ as a metaphor of embodiment is also a metaphor of connectedness, and these things are so clearly related in the Disability Justice movement that they can assist the church in understanding this metaphor better.

Disability theologian Stephanie Tate writes about these connections in her book *A View From Rock Bottom*, where she explores chronic illness, theology, and interdependence. When talking about Paul's metaphor, Tate notes that, "he tells the believers in Corinth that this call to generosity is not so 'others should be eased and you burdened,' (verse 13), but so the body of Christ is tied together in a community of interdependence – one where no one is left burdened, because each is being faithfully cared for by the other" (Tate 78%). This idea of care is central to

the Christian faith. Tate makes it clear that Paul is advocating for this interdependence that is inherently an embodied need. Christ's actual, physical body is vulnerable and wounded and spent time caring for and being cared for by the other, and it is the job and joy of the Church to create that in the metaphorical Body of Christ.

My friends and I, as we went through college in this wonderfully interconnected friendship, were able to understand better what the Church should be. At our school, we were required to attend chapel, and each of us all wanted to attend chapel personally as well, but we noticed quickly that it was not going to work out well. The chapel was full of colored and sometimes moving and flashing lights, as well as being decorated with many scented candles (and attended by people who wore perfume that we may have to sit near as well). So clearly, being in the chapel space was physically harmful or impossible. We knew this for ourselves and each other and made it a habit of accommodating for everyone's needs by avoiding the main room and sitting in the hallway. Often the doors were closed and others could not see the stage, which was perfect for me, or, when we were told to turn and hug or shake hands during the "passing of the peace" with the people around us, we couldn't go in because the smell was too strong for my friend, yet we all took these requirements of each other's bodies on ourself. The three or four of us who would gather there each week knew each other's lives and bodies well enough to know that we needed to stay there and we wanted to be together. At times, one of us might have been fine going in, but we were so intertwined that we never questioned that we would be there, for and with each other and ourselves, in the hallway, together. We sometimes found that the school had put out chairs for us, and other times we would sit on the floor. It was hard, of course, to know that we were not being cared for by the church community in the way that we needed, but we were able to find Church there for ourselves. We would sing and dance to

worship, teach each other sign language to the songs, hug each other during the passing of the peace, and cry together when they said that everyone was welcome at the communion table, but we could not go in. We found love, joy, community, and Christ there, together, while we were being excluded from where we “should have” found those things. The Church as a whole could learn from Disability Justice and grow to include all people by entering into embodied need and creating a community that unites around the particularity of each other, instead of flashing lights and scented candles.

Tate understands, as did Paul, that, “The goal for the Christian was never meant to be independence and self-sufficiency, but interdependence and sufficiency found only in Christ and shared wholly with one another in community” (Tate 80%). This is the fullness of the Body of Christ and every person including Christ as embodied beings. The body is relational and cannot be understood or even exist without community. The body needs that community and interdependence to live and thrive. Prayers for daily bread, for what the body needs, is a prayer for connectedness and interdependence. Practically, that daily bread comes from farmers, bakers, storekeepers, and more broadly, that daily bread comes from each and every one of us. The Disabled community knows how to find joy and beauty in this interdependence, just as a prayer for daily bread would hope for. I pray that the Church learns to lean on the Disabled community to help everyone receive the joy and fullness of their daily bread and all that their body and the Body needs.

Forgive Us Our Trespasses As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us, And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil

Roland Johnson lived a significant portion of his life institutionalized and later became a prominent figure in the Disability Rights movement by speaking out against institutionalization. He dictated an account of his life, *Lost in a Desert World*, which has become the most in-depth account of institutionalization from a Disabled perspective that exists today. Even now, during the time that this paper has come together, there have been Disabled activists protesting on Capitol Hill chanting and holding signs saying, “Homes, Not Institutions” for the many institutionalized Disabled people living isolated right now. To read Roland Johnson’s book was not only to think about Disability history, but was an invitation into injustices going on in America and around the globe right now. Especially in the era of COVID 19, institutionalization is actively still harming and killing Disabled people on a massive scale. In his book, Johnson recounts his experience before, after, and during his time institutionalized. He alludes to many terrible moments of pain and injustice he faced, as well as going in depth on some of the abuses that he and his peers experienced and that people continue to experience today.

His book is full of stories he dictated pertaining to what institutionalization was like and the ways in which he was forever harmed by these experiences. One of many such times Johnson notes was when he says that, “I was punished on the ward and I seen what other patients had to go through. And they had to lie about it. That when their parents would come to see them, staff would say, ‘Well, we didn't do that.’ Staff would tell you, ‘And if you go and tell your parents that we did it, we will find out and we will write a little note and put you on another ward.’ And

they'll put you in a hole, a sweat box. And they would beat you up there, if you told your parents that this was happening. I was so frightened. And not only just me. There was other clients being abused, getting hit over with the mop. And this is not patients doing this. This is staff. I saw it with my own very eyes” (Johnson 33%). Though Johnson’s parents visited intermittently and he described his abuse from the staff and other, older inmates that the staff was aware of, nothing was ever done about it. He made several mentions of sexual abuse as well throughout the stories of his time in the institution.

In addition to all of this and more abuses that he faced, as well as the overwhelming fact that he was unwillingly and unjustly locked away from community and denied his basic human needs, Johnson spoke of the inherent issue of staffing in institutions. When people are protesting for “Homes, Not Institutions” one of the rights they are advocating for is to live their lives how they choose, fundamentally, living community without staff members regulating them, which is not something that many people even realize they have a right to.

To make it worse, the staffing that is controlling and often abusing them, is often not nearly enough to assist them when needed. Many institutions have up to hundreds of Disabled people on each floor, and yet only a handful of staff members. Johnson explains that in his experience, “They had a few staff persons on M-1, but they didn't have enough staff persons to cover that ward. When it was cold and snow they didn't have staff - one of the staff had to work overtime; they couldn't get another staff to change shift. And we had to sleep there when there was no staff” (39%). This lack of staffing is present in many institutions and is deeply problematic for several reasons. First of all, there is more room for abuse to happen because there are less people watching and those who are there to help are so overextended that they end up resorting to neglect, if not abuse. Along those same lines, because there are fewer staff,

people get treated less humanly because even though they are supposedly put in an institution to “help” them, the staff doesn’t have time to engage well with each person. This too ends in neglect and abuse and a general dehumanization even around simple tasks like eating or distributing medications, which is precisely what institutions are supposed to support Disabled people in. The subjugation, ableism, and horrible abuse of Disabled people in institutions like this should be deeply upsetting for everyone. In these situations, whether it be a lack of staff, a moment of abuse, or just generally being ripped out of homes and communities, it is clear that Disabled people are being harmed in unimaginable ways.

While I was listening to this book, there were several times where I had to put it down because I was so disturbed, but one of those times in particular has never left my mind anytime I enter into a Christian space now. Johnson, after listing a few different examples of sexual abuse, states that, “It wasn’t all bad. We went to church – a yellow bus took us out, the choir, to sing at another church” (Johnson 30%). If absolutely nothing else, this church, or multiple churches, should have noticed the major difference in the number of inmates and number of staff and worked to make sure each person was safe. That, to me, was the absolute minimum.

Then I remembered the church I grew up attending until high school and the, what now seemed horrendous, fact that a “group home” (which houses 119 people currently as well as many outpatient people who live in or attend for periods of time) would bring a group of adults to clean our church each week and attend a movie night here or there. While they were at these movie nights, though, the members of my church did their best to make sure they did not associate with the members of the “group home” (if it can be called a group home and not an institution with 119 people) and the staff, most often one woman for ten or fifteen adults, would do her best to ensure that the Disabled people didn’t “bother” anyone else. I went to two events

with them and quickly realized that it made me uncomfortable, but I couldn't understand why. What I later realized was that I, as a high schooler, was fundamentally wondering where I fit as a Disabled church member in that position. What I should have been wondering was why all of the Disabled church members from this "group home" weren't understood to be members at all and why no one questioned this very concerning set of events.

The Church must be at the front of Disability justice if its goal is to follow in the life of Christ, because most of his time was spent with Disabled people. Yet, the Church continues to hide from these realities and avoid the questions that need to be asked in order to give Disabled people care. This church and the one that Johnson mentioned clearly made choices that may have harmed many Disabled people instead of assisting in their liberation from institutionalization. It is the responsibility of the Church as a whole to not only care for, but also learn and grow from and ultimately be in community with Disabled people. The ways that the church has harmed Disabled people, though, have not gone unnoticed, and must be repented for and changed in order to truly embrace the unified life that Christ calls everyone to.

The question of repentance and forgiveness is deeply rooted both in the Jewish and Christian traditions and has been alluded to and firmly addressed by many of the most significant philosophers and theologians. When writing of forgiveness in a section entitled *To Forgive*, Jacques Derrida directly calls into question forgiveness as it relates to the Holocaust. With Disabled people being one of the groups, as test subjects before Jewish people, that were forced to live through the horrors of the Holocaust, it is deeply relevant to connect his philosophy to forgiveness in this section. Specifically, to this point, Derrida writes about what it means for the Church or other groups to ask for forgiveness after the fact, referring to philosopher Vladimir Jankelevitch and noting that, "He speaks to us, in short, of a duty of non-forgiveness, in the name

of the victims. Forgiveness is impossible. Forgiveness should not be. One should not forgive. We will have to ask ourselves again and again, what this 'impossible' might mean, and if the possibility of forgiveness, if there is such a thing, is not to be measured against the ordeal of the impossible. Impossible, Jankelevitch tells us: This is what forgiveness is for what happened in the death camps. 'Forgiveness,' says Jankelevitch, 'died in the death camps'" (Derrida 26-27). By asking for forgiveness, Derrida believes that one is asking for the impossible. This quotation makes it clear that, in the first place, the people who are to be asked "will you forgive me?" are the exact people who died in the death camps and thus forgiveness is impossible. Along with that, Derrida believes that the real situations that need to be forgiven are fundamentally unforgiveable. They are so egregious and harmful, that to forgive is simply impossible.

To ask for forgiveness in the context of prayer, especially when that prayer is turning to God and stating "help me to do as you do", is putting the impossible into the presence of God. This does not make forgiveness possible, but it makes forgiveness necessary. Derrida writes about this ongoing paradox, stating that, "I draw out an ethics that could be qualified as hyperbolic, for which forgiveness is the highest commandment; and, on the other hand, evil always appears beyond. Forgiveness is stronger than evil and evil is stronger than forgiveness. I cannot get out of this. It is a species of oscillation that in philosophy one would describe as dialectical and which seems infinite to me," (Derrida 29). To understand forgiveness as hyperbolic and infinite feels helpful to understanding what is being asked for in this part of the prayer. God, being beyond the infinite is truly the only hope of forgiveness, and even that, should be impossible. And yet, forgiveness must be asked for over and over in the ways that the Church engages in the world.

Starting from a place of forgiveness being infinitely impossible and completely needed, praying for forgiveness puts a call on everyone thinking about Disability theology to engage enough to become better to their Disabled neighbor and hold space for God to work in and through that prayer. This seems to be the posture that should be taken when currently thinking about Disability theology. The connection between the prayer “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” and “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” in this section was particularly for this point. Engaging further in order to do better in the future pulls us away from the evils that Disabled people have been faced with because of the intention or sometimes complacency of the Church and is a movement forward out of forgiveness and love.

Understanding the Church’s role in Disabled suffering and marginalization is necessary to moving forward in forgiveness and praying God to deliver us from the evil that continues to be done. Much of the harm that the church has caused Disabled people comes from underlying beliefs that bodies are inherently bad and something like a soul is good, along with the idea that Abled bodies are the “natural” and “ideal” form of a body, whereas Disabled bodies are counter to that. This belief, as noted earlier, comes from Platonic and Aristotelian ideas that have been adopted in general understanding today and are not only harmful to Disabled people, but also just inherently inaccurate. The problem with believing these ideas is that the direct outcome ends up being deeply ableist even if it is unintentional.

As these beliefs continue to develop in his writings, Plato asks and answers the question, “Can there be any question that the guardian who is to keep anything should have eyes rather than no eyes. There can be no question of that,” (Plato *Republic* 6:04:08-6:04:42). This is a particular outcome of his overarching beliefs that if bodies do not fit into his idealized form then

they are somehow inherently worse and should thus not be treated as fully human. When people's underlying beliefs are wrapped up in his ideas, the same outcome arises and harms the Disabled community. This in particular comes right before the Allegory of the Cave which is fundamentally sight-based in its metaphor, leading readers to believe that seeing is linked to understanding. Accepting this assumption ended up creating that as one of the most common metaphors in philosophical discourse. This belief, though, works to deem people who do not have sight as less than others and, as Plato notes, will end (and has ended time after time) in treating them differently than others in ways that negatively impact them and potentially the community as a whole. Ultimately, Plato takes this harmful rhetoric to a practical, and deeply alarming, conclusion when he writes "I think they'll take the children of good parents to the nurses in charge of the rearing pens situated in the separate part of the city, but the children of inferior parents, or any child of the others that is born defective, they'll hide in a secret and unknown place, as is appropriate" (Plato *Republic* 134). With this quotation in mind, it is imperative to address the institutionalization of Disabled people that is still taking place to this day. Institutionalization's horrific reality comes directly from the blatant acceptance of Platonic understandings of how bodies should be. It has been widely accepted that Plato's claim is correct in that those who are deemed "defective" in any way are to be hidden away. Far after this quotation was written by Plato, many places in America adopted the "Ugly Laws", which deemed certain people too "ugly" due to Physical Disability to appear in public and punished them if they were to be caught outside of their houses. The Church, in supporting or being neutral to institutionalization, is often functioning off of the basic Platonic ideas that lead them to a similar conclusion. Along with this, as noted earlier, Aristotle took his beliefs to mean that Disabled people were not even "functional" enough to be deemed human, but instead wrote of

them as a “monstrosity”. It should be widely known that Plato and Aristotle’s understandings led to these harmful ideologies that are still impacting people who are alive now every single day, and yet it is not.

Even just in this section considering the “Ugly Laws”, institutionalization, and the churches role in perpetuating the ableist philosophy of Plato, it is clear that forgiveness is an impossibility in Derrida’s understanding. For what is now thousands of years, Disabled people have been negatively affected even to the point of death by these ideas and they continue to be affected today. To pray for forgiveness is impossible. There no longer is room to be forgiven for the egregious acts that have happened against Disabled people. And yet, to pray for forgiveness is to go as far back as the origins of these ideas and ask that God is doing the impossible. More than that, it is a belief that God wants to do the impossible through us, and challenges and calls us to educate ourselves on these ideas and work in service and love to bring about justice in the ways that we can for our Disabled neighbors whom we are called to love.

To do that, understanding the ways that Platonic and Aristotelian ideals have impacted today’s cultural ideology is deeply important. Their core beliefs of body-negativity and body/soul dualism may not seem harmful at first, but it is clear that the practical repercussions of adopting these beliefs in the way that they have been adopted today have led to harming Disabled people in notable ways. As addressed earlier, the fact that the Church adheres so strongly to these core ideas, leads many to assert that Disabled people will not be allowed in Heaven as they are. Further, this extends to all areas of church life for Disabled people.

As noted, theologian Henri Nouwen wrote in incredibly harmful ways about what resurrection would mean for the man, Adam, who had an intellectual disability, that he lived with that were fully linked to the idea of body/soul dualism. These more philosophical beliefs that,

while harmful, were not readily apparent to many, proved to guide the way that he lived and worked with Adam, which is one of the major issues with problematic Disability Theology. Nouwen shares that during his time getting Adam ready in the mornings, “A few times when I was so pushy, he responded by having a grand mal seizure, and I realized that it was his way of saying, ‘slow down Henri, slow down’” (Nouwen 31%). All of the problematic theology around bodies and disability created a situation where this, usually wonderful theologian was able to cause pain and issue and maybe trauma to Adam, and still take it as only a theological lesson about rest. When our theology is so far removed from the bodies and experiences of Disabled people, there is clearly opportunity to cause pain, physically and emotionally. These moments would be far fewer if the theology surrounding disability were not rooted in the idea that Disabled bodies are inherently less and that the bodily experience of someone is not less than the spiritual one. Adam had seizures because Nouwen was working too quickly and thus did not care for his body in the way that he was entrusted to; if this is to be linked to theology at all, it should be linked to the problems that allow us to be so far removed from bodies and each other that lets us cause pain.

Another point in which this is evident comes from Nouwen’s book, but is in reference to other church spaces. He notes that, “Adam was not fully recognized in his church, and it was painful for his parents when they learned that because of his handicap, Adam could not receive the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation with the other children of his age” (Nouwen 12%). While this was painful for Adam’s family, it was likely more painful for Adam himself. The fact that everyone else got to participate in the Body of Christ this way and yet one individual was excluded is deeply problematic. While it is not my goal to argue what Adam could or could not understand, it is, in fact, a reality that not a single person understands the fullness of God’s

presence and love in the act of the Eucharist, and it is evident that the people they love around them were getting up to partake in this event that they could not do. Allowing that to be the case in this deeply important liturgical act of taking communion implies that Adam cannot connect with God in the same way as everyone else, and does not allow him to. Aside from the fact that the church is absolutely incomplete without Adam's engagement in communion, there is the fact that exclusion is problematic emotionally as well. To further this, personally, I have already noted how harmful it was to be the only people in the hallway during my university's chapel when communion was served. The table of God is open...to *almost* everyone. This same logic applies to baptism and other sacraments as well. I have several friends who have had to fight for their right to be baptized or receive communion because the church did not believe that they would fully comprehend what was happening. It is clear in scripture that everyone is welcome to the table of God and that no one will fully understand the work of God in these areas, so the harmful rhetoric around their exclusion will only result in them leaving the church, them feeling inadequate to relate with God, and ultimately, the church will not exist its fullest potential with every member of the Body. These moments of exclusion in particular seem to further Derrida's idea of the impossibility of forgiveness. When people are left excluded from God's table, forgiveness is impossible. It is futile to hope for forgiveness when the communion table or the baptismal fount are places of exclusion, because they have become so contradictory to what God is trying to do in them. Yet, to pray for forgiveness is to pray that God continues to work, and that we continue to allow God to work through us, even when these moments are contradicting what God is doing. To ask for forgiveness and to work towards a better world where God's table has come and everyone is included in regards to these moments is absurd and yet the most important thing we can do.

These moments, too, are not the only ones in which the Church must pray for the impossible. When Disabled people do find their way to a church that is at least accessible enough for them to enter and not be asked to leave, it is only a matter of time before they are faced with the church's ideas on healing. To understand why, for many Disabled people the concept of healing is deeply harmful, it is important to pay attention to how Disabled people respond to situations of healing. Activist Keah Brown, who was quoted previously, has a whole chapter in her book called "You can't cure me, I promise it's fine". In this chapter she writes about many attempts that people make to heal her, but in particular dives into her faith and talks about the harmful notions of healing she has gotten from the church. She starts off the chapter telling a story of a woman who approached her in the store when she was only 12. The woman commented on her physical differences and tells her that she is praying for God to fix her. Brown accounts how this made her feel different and, in combination with many other similar events, created a very negative sense of self-worth, especially when it came to religion and her relationship with God. It culminated when Brown was older and couldn't take moments like this anymore. She writes about this moment, stating that, "I was on Facebook minding my own business when a girl who I went to middle and high school with posted a video of a preacher 'healing' a girl with cerebral palsy. [...] I let her have it in the comments section. I told her she was the worst kind of person, one who used faith to push lies and make people feel less than whole. I reminded her of the damage that messages like hers did and why they were part of the reason that Disabled people often turned away from faith. I was not elegant in my wording. I did not know how to articulate the feeling of otherness, but I tried my best" (Brown 3:25:34-3:26:32). This is important to read because as she notes, this is her honest response to a post that many Christians would think was perfectly fine, if not good, to post. Brown, when faced with

moments like this often, for her whole life, recognizes that they push faith in a way that make people feel less whole, and that they deeply damage Disabled people's relationship to God and the church.

Brown is not the only one who believes this though. Many Disability activists, Christian or not, have at least part of a chapter of their book devoted to why healing prayer is problematic. Many of them express actual fear about entering church spaces, because they are nervous that they will be prayed for without consent. In addition to that, when healing stories are constantly preached that the removal of disability is the goal of God, many Disabled people are either minorly put off, or deeply hurt. Philosopher and theologian Sharon Betcher understands and explains that, "For those of us who live with disabilities, miracle stories such as John 5, because of a certain cultural preunderstanding with which these texts tend to be approached might best be designated 'texts of terror', to borrow here Phyllis Tribble famous feminist phrase, referring to stories such as the rape of Tamar and the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter in the Hebrew testament. Such healing accounts with their purported promise of miraculous remediation to normalcy, often contribute, not to the wellbeing of [Disabled] persons, but most frequently to our social and spiritual segregation" (Betcher 27%). While many lay Disabled people may not have words to describe the ways that these texts become "Texts of Terror" they definitely have the internal feelings that relate to this assertion which cause them to leave and even be fearful of the church. Betcher is right to note that these are deeply harmful particularly in that they connect to a false ideal of "normalcy" that segregates Disabled people out of God's presence.

It is important to note that, while many Disabled people feel this way, ultimately it is up to the person. Some Disabled people are hoping for or actively searching for God to bring them healing. In these cases, healing can be a deeply beautiful and fulfilling experience with God.

While that is wonderful and true, it is also completely wrong of the Church to assume that Disabled people all want healing or that every Bible story with healing in it points to the fact that God's goal is to remove disability from the world or from these people's lives.

To understand that healing is something that God can still do, but the goal of healing is never the removal of disability is possible. It is also possible to honor Disabled people who do not want to be healed in the Church and in interpretations of healing stories. A deeper theology of what God is doing in these healing stories will come in the next section, but for now, it is important to understand why the current interpretations of healing that do not focus on these ideas, are so harmful. To understand the underlying issue with these interpretations, remembering the difference between the medical model and the social model of disability is important. The medical model asserts that people with disabilities have an aspect of their body that needs to be "fixed", medically or otherwise. It is within this context that healing stories are currently preached. Someone has a disability that medicine cannot fix, Jesus comes along and miraculously heals them, and then they are left better off after losing that part of them. Many Disabled people agree with the medical model, and in that case, these interpretations are helpful, but more often than not, Disabled people find the medical model harmful. It is notably problematic to them because they do not believe that there is a problem to be fixed. Disability is understood to be a powerful part of one's identity and the idea of it being removed is upsetting, scary, and diminishing of who we are. These stories are then problematic when preached this way because instead of embracing the fact that Disabled people are fine as they are, the stories are interpreted to mean that Christ took a Disabled person's body, changed them, and brought them up to a Platonic ideal of what a body "should" be. This is harmful to those who believe that their bodies are not only okay as they are, but love their Disabled body for who they are and the

community they are part of. Understanding healing stories in regards the social model, which is often Disabled people's preferred model of understanding disability, creates a powerful and beautiful theology that affirms Disabled people as they are and if they want to be healed, but using the medical model is likely outright or subconsciously harmful.

I personally have had to work for years to understand Jesus as anything aside from someone who unwillingly wants to change who I am, and that would not have been the case if the medical model were not the dominate way of understanding healing. Instead, though, I lived with people coming up to me at church, school, and in public, offering to pray to make me different than I am. This is anything from a subtle, "I'm praying for you" and healing is assumed, to actual strangers attempting to pray demons out of my eyeballs. They all attempted to explain that Christ was the Great Physician and when I asserted that I didn't want to be healed, many just told me I did not have enough faith. These experiences happen often and to so many people, that clearly churches need to either make an immediate and intense effort to help their parishioners to re-understand healing, or Disabled people will continue to be segregated from the church and the presence of God. Again, forgiveness is impossible and yet must be prayed for. When it takes years, sometimes more than a lifetime, for Disabled people to be comfortable with the idea of Jesus again after how he, and therefore God, has been presented to them, the Church has moved so far beyond forgiveness and God's hope for love in the world, it is impossible to forgive. The Church has made Jesus into something that is not God, but a way to amplify their exclusionary beliefs which alienates people and goes directly against what God is doing. Forgiveness can only come from God going beyond the impossible. God must redeem these moments, and we must join with God in attempts to reveal who God truly is.

This change that needs to take place must go down all the way to the language that is used in the church. Many preachers and Christians in general use disability in order to convey a negative point. For example, it is often preached that some people are “blind to the truth” or that “crippling fear” is not God’s goal for our lives. Many times words for disability get linked to negative Christian concepts. This is problematic first because the Blind or Crippled person who is sitting in the audience listening will be singled out and unintentionally told that their experience is negative. More problematic than that, though, is that when, for example, Blind is linked to ignorance repeatedly, then when someone meets me, a Blind person, for the first time, they automatically start talking in a condescending tone in order to infantilize me and they assume that I am lacking common knowledge, or when someone meets a person in a wheelchair (many of whom have reclaimed the word Crippled), they are automatically subconsciously connecting the experience to fear. Clearly the church needs to play an active role of using language in a way that does not create theological reasons for people to think less of Disabled people. This comment is not to provide an extensive list of words not to use, or the right ways to use them, but instead to get those who care about theology and Disabled people to think about the words they use and edit their own language accordingly.

The pain that the Church has caused Disabled people from the Holocaust and institutionalization to harmful ideas of healing and language, need to be at the forefront of theology and the collective Body of Christ. In order to repent of the evil being done and attempt to be better, each Christian must examine how they are unknowingly entering into ableist church practices and analyze how they can move away from them. Ultimately, as Derrida notes, forgiveness is somehow both impossible in situations where it is desperately needed, and yet, the only answer. This confession to be prayed often and sincerely in order for the Church to attempt

to reconcile their relationship with the Disabled community. And so, I hope that both individuals and the Church as a whole will join with Christ in praying for the forgiveness of sins and the deliverance from temptation and evil.

For Thine is The Table, And The Power, And The Glory Forever and Ever.

After a great deal of thought, I made the decision to go on the college group retreat with my church a few years ago. I had experienced many accommodation and inclusion issues on retreats in the past, and memories of those popped up in my mind as I thought about going to another one. People could have switched lights on and off without telling me and that would have caused pain. We could have had to read something to do an activity and I would be excluded. We might have watched a movie and I would have to go sit alone in my room. All of these things had already happened multiple times at retreats in the last year alone, so I was scared that they would happen again, but I had hope in knowing that the pastor had responded well to my accommodation needs in the past. I hoped that maybe this experience would be different, even though I honestly did not expect it to be.

Unbeknownst to me, once the pastor learned I was coming on the retreat she and the rest of the leadership team made sure that everything we did worked for me. There was not a single flashing light, fan, image, movie, or word that I had to read. Every single game was planned in a way that not only accommodated me but included me so seamlessly that I never once had to be concerned about my disability. Instead, I could just be wholly who I was. There was no need for me to feel guilty for my needs or plan ahead to make it work for me because it was set up to include me as I was. No one else realized that the ways we prayed and connected to God, the games we played, and even the down time activities we brought along were perfectly set up to

work for me, but that night I grabbed my friends, went to my room, and cried. I was amazed because I knew they noticed me. I knew they accepted me. I knew that I didn't have to fight to be included. I knew that was Church and that was God. I knew that I was loved.

That weekend I was welcomed and loved in ways I never had been before. That retreat made people recognize that instead of being scared or uncomfortable with differences, if we accept people for who God made them to be, then we experience a broader idea of who God is. I was amazed by the way that everyone was able to experience God and community in a new way, mostly without even knowing it, because the leaders had cared enough to acknowledge the particularity of every student on the retreat and create a space where there were no stipulations on who was included. I didn't have to "make up" for the fact that I was Disabled. I got to be Disabled in the presence of my church and in the presence of God, and it let everyone experience new ways of connecting with God and each other. Because my body, and every body, was honored in its particularity, so was God.

My pastor could not have done this without care, she could not have done this without taking the time to get to know me in my particularity, and ultimately, she could not have done this without taking the adequate time to examine her theology around disability. Because she had put in that work, God was honored in the way that she included me. Many pastors in the past had avoided including me, tried to pray my disability away so that I wouldn't need an accommodation, or had explicitly told me that churches are not required to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act. But, this pastor had done the work and everyone benefitted from a more robust way of understanding God and each other. This was a very explicit example and, to this day, the clearest one in my life of honoring God through Disability Theology. To pray "For Thine is the table, and the power, and the glory forever and ever" in a Disability Theology

context, means something like that. It means honoring God by honoring God's creation and honoring Disabled people as they are. It means examining the ways each person understands disability and theology and their intersection. It means finding ways to experience God that everyone can participate in so that others can understand God better through different expressions of faith. But to do that, and to affirm that the table, the power, and the glory are God's, there must be a move away from harmful theology into something more powerful and more glorifying. In this section, I intend to enter into conversation around several main theological ideas with a Disability Hermeneutic in order to start a process of affirming God's table, power, and glory from that perspective. In no way is this the final stop, but instead it is an entrance into the Body of Christ that includes Disabled people in their fullness in order to honor God more meaningfully. After thinking further about these points, it is my hope that more churches and people are able to experience the goodness of God in ways similar to how I did on that retreat. The Church needs more Disability Justice and real, concrete love and in order to do that entering into each of these subjects with a Disability Hermeneutic is vital.

### Healing

Because the healing passages have been widely regarded as "texts of terror" among Disabled people, it is important to acknowledge the immediate need to rethink how these stories are understood. As noted previously, many people do want to be healed and God can engage in

healing works, and yet, that is not the final point of the stories. If Jesus' body is not working under Platonic ideals of what a body "should" be, then when he is engaging in healing, this "healthy norm" (which is really not "normal" at all) cannot be his goal. Christ is not functioning under the laws of Platonic philosophy. God is doing something much bigger. For those who want healing, it is important to be aware of God's work in this area, but for all Disabled people, those who want to be healed as well as those who are more than satisfied being Disabled, there needs to be a far more inclusive understanding of what healing is. When healing gets preached or talked about as "fixing" or bringing to "wholeness", Disabled people, regardless of if they want healing or not, are understood to be "broken" or less than "whole", and, when faced with the wounds of Christ, we know this cannot be true. Theologian Stephanie Tate writes explicitly of the pain she and her son have been caused in moments where healing is mentioned, writing that, "There were those who suggested God would only heal my disabilities if I had a pure enough faith. Or they claimed that my lack of healing could suggest an area of hidden sin in my life, which my continuing pain was meant to call into repentance. There was the church that made wildly inappropriate disabled parking signs that featured the symbol of a person in a wheelchair with the phrase 'soon to be healed'. There was the woman who told me she was praying for Aidan to be healed of 'the curse of autism', and I could 'take hope in knowing there would be no more autism in heaven' - which was all problematic enough without her saying this right in front of Aidan himself. Yes, faith healing and I had a painful history to say the least, and we were no longer on speaking terms" (Tate 86%). This pain is all too common in the Disabled community. Many people even note the fear that an idea of healing causes, because it is taking away part of themselves. There are countless stories, much like Tate's, that give evidence that the Church needs to do much better in this area.

It is important to honor both the truth in scripture that these people's bodies are changing as they encounter Jesus and that this change is not meant to assume that their body was less than before it was changed. When reading these "healing stories" together and aside from other Biblical texts, they may be understood as multiple similar accounts of healing, yet when reading them in the greater context as particular moments with particular people and Christ, there is a much more nuanced understanding. There is not one way to interpret "healing stories" and even deeming them all "healing stories" as if they can be separated into a category alone creates a false ease of interpretation. There is not one way to preach each of these encounters in a way that wholly honors God and Disabled people, but when understood in their particularity and context, each can be understood to exemplify God's love and justice for Disabled people and the world. The goal of this section is not to reinterpret each passage, but instead fill in gaps of context and particularity in order to understand each of them better on their own terms.

First of all, as noted previously, all of these stories are fundamentally true and the fact that people's bodies are changing is not beside the point. These encounters with God do cause bodies to change. Yet, when these stories are read as the only time God changes bodies, the Church lacks a fullness in understanding of how God moves. Throughout the Bible, God is at work changing bodies all the time. It is noted that when people interact with God, "the withholding of the body--the stiffening of the neck, the turning of the shoulder, the closing of the ears, the hardening of the heart, the making of the face like stone--necessitates God's forceful shattering of the reluctant human surface and repossession of the interior [...] The fragility of the human interior and the absolute surrender of that interior, that does not simply accompany belief, that is not simply required by belief, but that is itself belief" (Scarry 50%). Scarry is right to note that God changes people's particular bodies in the moment of interaction and belief. This

changing of bodies is not understood to be bringing them up to a certain standard, or even healing them at all, but instead changing the body in order to relate to God in that moment. These stories of hearts being softened, necks unstiffening, bodies turning back to God, and many more, are all physical moments of belief. Often, these are not understood to be linked with healing, but instead, healing is something different. To understand these moments and healing together is to note first of all, that God works with and on bodies. God cares about the particularity and material physicality of our bodies, and that alone is important to note. More than that, though, God relates to people in moments of bodily change.

It may be easy to assume up to this point that all bodily change can be understood as healing, but that is not the case. For instance, consider the story of Jacob wrestling with God. In this encounter with God, Jacob's body is radically changed, but in a way that would be considered not healing but, in fact, Disabling. After this event, this moment of belief and connection with God, Jacob left more Disabled. Yong understands that, "his disability was a sign not just of showing his strength in wrestling with another, but of one who prevailed even against God Godself. Finally, given Jacob's patriarchal status among the people of Israel, the reference to their not eating the thigh muscle can be taken also as symbolically indicative of their ongoing reception of a Disabled man as one of their founding fathers" (Yong 20%). To understand the many passages like this one, where people's bodies become more Disabled in an encounter with God, adds another level to this bodily change. Not only is Jacob more Disabled, but God calls people to honor that disability because it was a marking of a place of encounter with God. God does not work by the Platonic form that has a universal standard of what a body "should" be, but instead changes bodies to mark, love, and know people better. In each of these moments of bodily change, God is revealing more of Godself to humanity. That revelation is not that God

wants all bodies to be one way, but instead that God engages and cares about bodies and who they are. Healing being separated from stories like this make it so that it is easy to say God is making bodies “better”, but that “better” is only on a scale that by which God is not defined. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example of this and his body is completely changed by the wounds of his torture and crucifixion, and those wounds reveal God’s character and embody belief in God in a completely new way. These wounds, as noted in Nancy Eiland’s *The Disabled God* are not healed, but instead, become a hopeful and defining factor of God. To understand healing as God’s purpose for bodies does not provide the full picture, and instead harms those who have not been healed.

Ultimately, God is not concerned with healing, but with bodies. If healing were God’s primary goal, then all those who God encountered would be healed. But instead, they are loved, changed, and known for who they are – as their bodies are. There are many stories in the Bible of Disabled people, and to realize that is to re-understand healing to not be the final end. In the *Evolving Faith* podcast episode on Disability Theology, this is shared directly when it’s said that, “Mephibosheth is not the only Disabled body in the sacred text whose disabilities are largely ignored and dismissed in our faith consciousness. But they are creative ways in which God showed Godself sovereign. Persons who are Blind or have eye problems, Isaac, Paul, Bartimaeus, Samson and Leah. Those among the limp and otherwise Crippled: Jacob, Samsun, Zacchaeus, Mephibosheth, the bent woman, the one with the mangled hand, Ehud, one who was hard of hearing, Kusham, and the stutterer, Moses” (*Evolving Faith* 32:24-33:17). To take major figures in the Bible like Moses and Paul, and to recognize God’s work in them while they are Disabled, turns an understanding of healing into something completely different. Each of these people were Disabled, and some because of their encounter with God. All of these people and

bodies are honored in scripture and in God's work, and yet, none of them are healed. All of them are changed--through baptism, call, touch, or other movements of God. To read these separate from the healing stories makes it so that God is doing two different things, but if it is true that God is Love, then this love takes place both at the place of healing and at the place of Disablement. God is not bringing bodies up to a certain standard, or these people would have had very different stories. God is relating to bodies and changing bodies in that relation.

Aside from this, when healing is preached as meeting a specific standard, the nuance as to why God is changing the body in that way is left out. The assumption of God healing because being Disabled is "bad" and being healed is "better" is almost always implied, but if that were God's understanding, then each of the people above would likely have been healed in order to do God's work. Yet, that was not the case, so it is important to wonder why God would heal certain people in the first place. There is likely as many answers as there are bodies, just like when God is engaging with a body in a different way, God works specifically for that particular body. Many people who received healing were intentional about approaching Jesus specifically for the sake of healing itself, and Jesus chose to love them in that way that honored their wish. As noted, though, healing did not have to be an end in itself.

Betcher notes that one reason for healing may have been connected to other conditions at the time. She writes, "in the surrounding region of Ancient Middle East, this particular refrain of impediments – blindness, lameness, and deafness -- suggested ways in which debt slaves and prisoners of war were prevented from fleeing their captors [...] the Hebrew testament itself testifies to such practices: 'the Old Testament mentions a number of cases of the blinding of prisoners of war: Samson (Judg. 17:21), Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 25:7), and the story of the men of Jabesh (2 Sam. 11:2)" (Betcher 48%). To understand that these disabilities may have come from

events similar to what is described above gives a different understanding of why healing would be necessary in a situation. Evidently, some Disabled people are born with a disability that impacts who they are or otherwise have a disability that makes them more themselves, such as Moses or Paul. Yet, in situations like this, bodies are actively harmed by evils and healing is not just for the sake of removing a disability, but to allow for that situation not to have the final say. This is clearly not the case in every Biblical healing, but each story is particular and each has a backstory that goes untold. God's love for particular bodies could heal them for reasons like this, where the removal of disability is not the point, but instead a re-doing of what is just and what was taken unfairly. Throughout the Bible, in Jesus' own words, and in the Psalms, the healing of the Blind/Deaf/Lame is oftentimes mentioned in connection with the freeing of prisoners.

To further that, there are reasons unrelated to the disability that healing may have taken place as well. While there are many beautiful ways of understanding God's relation to people in these stories, disability theologians often note that, "At the very least, Jesus declared the petitioner clean, that is, acceptable and welcome in the community. Jesus, as it were, extended the boundaries of society and included in the holy community many who were otherwise excluded" (Pilch). In a large majority of the healing stories, though notably not in all of them, the person who had the encounter with Christ and was healed was then able to enter into community from which they were previously excluded. When it is understood that humanity is inherently grounded in relationality and community, there is no discounting the significance of healing that means restoration to community. Often, the label of unclean was specifically in order to keep others away from the person so that multiple people were not infected in a way that could do them harm or take their life. In cases like that, healing was the only hope for restoration. That, of

course, is also only in particular situations as well, though, because, as is clear, many did not receive healing.

To take this social healing idea further, these healings may have been metaphor for a larger point that Christ was trying to make. Much like the story of Peter who receives a vision about unclean meat becoming edible in order to recognize that all gentiles should be included at God's table, these healing stories may have pointed to a broader conclusion. Walter Brueggemann mentions this in his understanding of prophetic action, "It is in healing leprosy that Jesus contradicts the norms of society concerning clean and unclean and in causing that rethinking of clean and unclean, Jesus was in fact calling into question all the moral distinctions upon which society was based" (Brueggemann 56%). Instead of understanding each healing to be only in relation to that person, thinking about community in this regard is important. Christ made individuals clean, as Brueggemann notes, in order to contradict and question societal norms. By showing that these people were clean, Christ was opening the door for the Church to understand all Disabled people as clean and as those who should be included in community. People often believe that Jesus called Christians to heal, but there is a much larger movement at work. Ultimately, Jesus calls us to love, and, if some of these healings are to be prophetic in a way that exemplifies that all Disabled bodies are included, then it is important to recognize that, "Jesus decided once and for all that the Disabled are not untouchable. Therefore, the church is compelled to get close to people with disabilities" (*Evolving Faith* 34:00-34:16). This call to get close is foundational to the wholeness of what it means to be human. Humanity is a relational way of being, and Jesus, in these passages is getting close to Disabled people and exemplifying to the Church that this is how to live.

When considering healing stories, there is no one size fits all. To assume, and preach, that all of these stories are only to point to the fact that God wants humanity not to be Disabled is clearly wrong. Healing aims for inclusion, community, change, love, and breakthrough, much like every encounter with God does. To think of healing as anything less than that is to dishonor God and Disabled people. There is no denying that, “Hope aches not for a healer but for a caregiver. Not health, wholeness, integrity, but a cure: sanctity, justice, splendor, ecstasy, righteousness” (Keen). The Church is missing Christ’s point if it is only hoping for a healer. To hope for “sanctity, justice, splendor, ecstasy, righteousness,” and ultimately a caregiver is what will save us all.

### Body of Christ

As mentioned earlier in this project, the Body of Christ is deeply connected to disability justice, both metaphorically and physically. To understand the best way to interpret the theological concept of the Body of Christ as it relates to community, it is important to address the physical body of Christ that was born, died, resurrected, and is still sitting at the right hand of God. In the book *Accidental Saints* by well-known pastor and theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber, it is noted that Christ, “came to us in the most vulnerable of ways as a powerless flesh and blood newborn as if to say ‘you may hate your bodies, but I am blessing all human flesh. You may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. You may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability’” (Bolz-Weber 5:40:58-5:41:19). To understand Christ’s body as a way of re-thinking embodiment is exactly right. Christ as a vulnerable, wounded, living body before and after resurrection means that God is wholly and holily invested in bodies. To be

invested in bodies is to be invested in vulnerability, particularity, and need. Because God was and is a body, our embodiment matters to the metaphorical community that is the Body of Christ.

This theological concept of the Body of Christ was introduced in the New Testament writings of Paul. As noted, bodies are important, and Paul's body can be taken into this interpretation in a way that seems deeply helpful to understanding his meaning. While there is some disagreement, "It may be that Paul himself had a disability or had experienced some painful loss, possibly a partial loss of sight. There is no doubt that Paul is extremely conscious of the body. There is no other biblical author who speaks so frequently and with such variety of images of the body as does Paul," (Hull). To understand Paul as a Disabled, or at least possibly, Disabled author makes his conversation around the Body of Christ even more meaningful to Disability theology and should be something noted in the attempt to understand any Pauline theology at all. Understanding an author's particularity is important, especially when addressing what it means to be a body, as Paul does. Notably, it is not proven that Paul was Disabled, but statements such as "Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me" (Galatians 4:15 NIV) and "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!" (Galatians 6:11 NIV) make it a definite possibility. Noting that he was using large letters, seems at least to suggest a visual impairment that may have been left over from God blinding him, and then to add that he specifically told them that they would have "taken out their eyes and given them" to him points directly at the idea that his eyes would not work like theirs. These are both statements that not only make people wonder what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, but also are small remarks that Blind and Visually Impaired people often make about themselves today.

Not only should questions arise about why Paul is not widely considered Disabled, but also, how it would impact the notion of Body of Christ theology if he were. Disabled people currently are working under the concept of collective care, and rather than just implying that to this theology, it could be rooted in it all along. In fact, this metaphor of the Body of Christ may be one of the first examples of a call for collective care that exists and definitely the first rooted to the embodiment of Christ. This gives us a fuller picture of what Paul could have understood Christian community to be and also what Disabled people are striving towards. They are so deeply linked here that not only do they help each other, but theology and Disability justice may be so deeply intertwined that they cannot be disconnected. To understand collective care and the Body of Christ is important for all Christians.

As quoted earlier, author and theologian Stephanie Tate writes that, “The goal for the Christian was never meant to be independence and self-sufficiency, but interdependence and sufficiency found only in Christ and shared wholly with one another in community” (Tate 80%). This is both Disability justice and Christian Ethics intertwined especially related with the Body of Christ and the Churches call to love thy neighbor. While the western world continues to push independence, living as interdependent, connected people is deeply counter cultural and inherently Christian. Disabled people end up having to be in communities in a way that lives out interdependence much more closely to how the Church is called than most other groups of people, and so to learn from collective care is to engage in Christian life well. The beauty of connecting Paul, disability, and community is not only helpful, but necessary in celebrating the fullness of God’s presence in community and the Body of Christ.

The openness and woundedness of Christ’s body after the resurrection, and the impact of Paul’s bodily metaphor come together in order to acknowledge the openness that should be

within the Body of Christ as community. Considering all of this with a disability hermeneutic makes the point clear that “Within Jesus’ body, diversity has become the new norm, and living faithfully in the midst of diversity is the expected way of being in the world. As people are baptized into the body of Christ, so they enter into a space of deep and radical belonging. Within the body of Christ, every body has a place, and every body is recognized as a disciple with a call from Jesus and a vocation that the Church needs if it is truly to be the body of Christ” (Barton). This openness is more than inclusion because of the theological implications that Christ’s actual body imposes on it. The wounds not only break his body open for all people, rather violently, but they also remain wounded, are deeply messy, and mark him as who he is in his particularity. A Christian community aiming to be the Body of Christ must violently pull themselves open to everyone, remain open to the Other and allow for messiness in the Body. Not only does this mirror Christ’s body, but because Christ’s wounds help to define him, the Church must also be defined by this radical openness. All of this done in love of the Other is what it means to be the Body of Christ. As Betcher notes, “The point is not Jesus’ sole possession of power, but the revelation of a new understanding of power that connects members of the community [...] what is truly Christological... truly revealing of... salvific power in human life must reside in connectedness and not in individuals” (Betcher 46%). This openness, love, and messiness means nothing if it were alone. Bodies were not meant to be, nor can they exist being, alone. To embody the Body of Christ, the Church must remain open to community in bold, messy, and radical ways. This, without a doubt, includes being opened to Disabled people, which unfortunately still needs to be made explicit, but more importantly, this openness and love can be found in the Disabled community in ways that the Church must learn from in order to fully awaken to what the Body of Christ means.

## Trinity

Community is not only important to the Body of Christ, but also to the character of Christ. While we can turn towards Disabled people to get a beautiful understanding of what collective care and interdependence would be like at its best, this is only groping at what humanity is designed to be. There is a deep need, as expressed more directly earlier, for interdependence and care, in the very nature of what it means to be human, and yet, humanity can never reach community in its fullest sense.

Stephanie Tate acknowledges the ways in which God intended community by contemplating God as trinity. She urges those reading or listening to her book to, “Consider for a moment that God himself--the embodiment of complete perfection, strength, and omnipotence--exists in a triune form. In the trinity, we have a God who dwells in community in and unto himself, a God in three persons and yet one in perfect unity. As we were created in the Image of that God, it seems problematic to think independence could be an element of that design. How could we reflect a perfect state of community if we are meant to seek self-sufficiency and avoid dependence on one another?” (Tate 80%). While people living in Western cultures are prone to regard individuality and independence as a goal, there is no picture of this anywhere in God, let alone in God’s plan for creation in scripture. Throughout the Bible, God is communal, either in Godself or with humanity. The Triune God exemplifies God’s nature for community and while humanity is incapable of fully breaking down the barriers between themselves and the Other, there is a call on every life to enter into community. This triune community is radically open, messy, and defining of who God is. Christ enters straight into the messiness to open God up to an even greater relation to humanity and by the life, death, and resurrection of God, the opening

stays open for us. Community pervades God fully and completely and God never exists without community because it is who God is. Humanity must dive into a radical, loving, interdependence in order to relate to each other much as the Trinity engages fully and completely as God.

God is both body and community, particularity and unity. Disability Justice calls for a recognition of the particularity of each body and yet a communal care between all of humanity. The similarities of these cannot go unnoticed when the job of Christians is to love God and love neighbor. Love in this way holds the paradox of both existing as body and community. Love holds space for particularity, and somehow, because of that particularity, there is community and unity in a way that does not erase the parts of the community but instead honors us. To read of the Trinity with a Disability Hermeneutic finds these principles that Disabled people continuously strive for in the very nature of God, and offers space for them to exist in humanity as well. Missing Disabled understandings of love and care as well as God and scripture does not bring a full understanding to what it means for God to exist as three in one. While no human can succeed in entering into a relationship as fully particular and fully united, Disabled people move closer and closer to that in their pursuit of justice, and God calls the Church to go after this sort of Love by existing as the fullest expression of it.

#### Imago Dei

It is clear within the understanding of the Body of Christ and human embodiment that humanity is to be in community. This is, then, much like the Triune God who only ever exists in perfect particularity and community at once. Yet, there is no way for humanity to reach the perfected unity of the Triune God. Instead, we are always groping after it. This attempt for community and particularity is the goal of the Church and the Body of Christ, and yet,

“The hospitality of the Church is only to be found as we are gathered by Jesus alongside all of those Jesus loves and calls us to love. The power of this act comes not because Jesus represents the best of what we are capable. Let us not forget that we are radically incapable of true hospitality. Jesus is not merely a model for achievable righteousness. Rather, Jesus is righteousness itself. [...] The impossible hospitality is hoped for only because Jesus is God. He is not emptied of divinity, but is divinity left unclaimed. This paradox could never provide a model for us, but it is this ridiculous offense that will save us all” (Ross).

The impossibility of this hope for hospitality is what Christians are searching after and what the ideal collective care movement attempts to bring. While there is never a way that humanity can enter into this sacred love and care, it is with the life of Christ and the promise of salvation that people can hope for the impossible. Somehow, while there is no way for humanity to reach it, this love still happens. The momentary, fleeting love that is this imperfect hope for life, is what makes us human and Christian.

While humanity is longing for this particular and communal love, it has not come yet. It is not, nor will it be, fulfilled on this side of the resurrection. But it is where God breaks in and where we, like God, enter into ourselves, our community, and our humanity. The love that humanity is meant to realize is only existing in God, and came in Jesus, and exists not as a guarantee, or even an option, but as something to strive towards and to hope in. Much of theology can be thought of in this way, including that, “The liturgy of the Eucharist is best understood as a journey or procession. It is the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom” (Schmemmann 13%). This Eucharistic journey is something that we are all called to

and are constantly living into. The perfection of this journey is only reached in Christ and the moments that we miraculously enter into it are God at work creating a new thing in us.

On this Eucharistic journey, humanity enters into momentary experiences of love and truth that continue God's creation within us, moving us towards this love and community. Ross notes that, "The Church, as the Church, is a long history of events, of temporality. It only exists in the way a gift exists. The Church happens, or perhaps more appropriately, the Church is the site of an event that happens to us. That event, the event that calls us out of ourselves, is Jesus" (Ross). Understanding the Church, the Eucharist, and the creation of humanity in the Image of God is acknowledging God's continual work of redemption. Rather than being at once named the Church, or at once made in God's image, being continuously created as a Church and as a human in these moments of God's presence is claiming the astonishing--that God is creating, that God is redeeming, and that God is loving us towards eschatological hope. Rather than having an attribute of humanity be in God's image, instead, the *Imago Dei* is something that in these moments of love and encounters with Jesus, humanity is being ever created into. These events of Jesus, of Emmanuel, God with us, are creating us in God's image even now.

Theologian Craig Keen writes of this explicitly, noting that instead of being an attribute of a person, "The image [of God] rather would come; it would come as a gift never becoming a possession, a gift never ceasing to be a gift. Genesis 1:27, therefore, would speak first of the God whose movement yielded whatever might be said to hallow humankind, and only then, freely and derivatively, speak of the human creature in this way momentarily touched by God. Thus, the image of God would be an event that called, that challenged us to respond" (Keen). This understanding of the *Imago Dei* as a gift and as an event is with the radical hope that God is forever creating and forever loving and that we are both what is being created and what is

receiving. To understand the Image of God as the moments where we experience this love, this community, this particularity, means that we are being created in God's image as we engage as a Church and as we enter into life together. In these events when we encounter and are being created in God's image it is that, "God comes close who from first to last is unqualifiedly other—comes to us—so close that one may not here speak either of God in isolation from us or of us in isolation from God. To understand either is to understand the other in this event. Where God and we concur is where God and we most enact a gifting alterity" (Keen). We are being created in God's image because God is love and that Love is entering into our lives to be with us and is creating us as we encounter it. Those events will be fulfilled eschatologically but are currently momentary and always unable to be created by human beings ourselves. Instead, God is coming so close that we cannot be separated, and God's image of love is being imprinted, for a fleeting moment, on who we are, and that changes, or creates, us even now.

The *Imago Dei* is not simply a good moment or a positive attribute of humanity, but the unexplainable call towards God and towards love. While we cannot ever arrive, "Humankind is created to move to this outgoing, to this image, to stand out in it, to go after it. In other words, humankind, not in itself the image of God, 'is created in correspondence [*entsprechend*] with the image of God,' is created speaking (*sprechend*) out (*ent-*) in answer to the divine image; speaking freely with what it is and is called to engage, and only thus actually human" (Keen). To be human means to have the ability to relate, and in particular, to relate with God and those God loves. These relations provide space for the ongoing creation of humanity. This is the already and not yet that is experienced as humanity going after God. Ultimately, humanity is only human in this pursuit of God and love because of these imprintings of God's image onto particular humans in the moment in which they are being created into themselves.

To claim that Disabled people are created in the Image of God means something far more than that our bodies or “souls” are somehow matching God’s, but in fact, honoring the fact that everyone exists as body and humanity needs every body in order to experience love in its fullness. Nancy Eiesland writes that, “Our bodies participate in the Imago Dei, not in spite of our impairments and contingencies, but through them” (Eiesland 101) which is fundamentally true, not in a visual sense that these bodies look like God’s, but that people can better be created in the Image of God when love is understood to be communally opening to the particularity of the Other. Disabled people understand love in particular ways and can expand the Churches way of loving, whereas when we are not included, the particularities of our bodies are lost. To enter into love as a particular person and not lose that particularity but be better able to love in community because of that particularity is part of this paradox. Not only is the particularity of Disabled people important because it can help bring this experience of love based on particularity, but Disabled people understand how to have community based on particularity in a specific and interdependent way.

The Church, grasping after the Image of God, must not only include everyone in order to love them, but must include everyone in order to experience love more fully. To refer back to Ross, “The hospitality of the Church is only to be found as we are gathered by Jesus alongside all of those Jesus loves and calls us to love” (Ross). This hospitality is impossible, yet hoped for. This hope, these fleeting experiences of bodies and moments that create us in the Imago Dei, are what we yearn for. They not only call for full inclusion in order to love and be loved, but can only exist because God is somehow fully united yet open to all particularity. Bodies and moments being rooted in this love create us in the Imago Dei.

I wonder, if when we read John 9's account of Christ interacting with a Blind man and note Christ's words that this man was born Blind, "so that the works of God must be displayed in him" (verse 3), we are missing the meaning and instead too quickly reaching the conclusion that healing is the only manifestation of God's work. God's work is primarily of creation. God continues to create us, day by day, in God's image. God's work, being displayed in this man, could very well be understood to mean that this man was born Blind therefore the Image of God would be revealed more broadly within this body. Blindness teaches a different understanding of love and life and that particularity, in its relation to community, can add to the moments of deep love and experience of God that otherwise could not exist. It can add to the moments of creation in the Imago Dei, because it is in these moments, that the work of God is being displayed in us.

### Eucharist

Maybe the most prominent expression of both a moment of being created in God's image where God breaks in and where God changes bodies takes place in the Eucharist. This Eucharistic moment is given to us as we partake in it, not for our use, but to change us from inside our bodies. The moment of the Eucharist is a fundamental changing of our bodies in a way that pulls us closer to God. Those who engage in this practice are experiencing this moment of creation because, "They are the temple of the power of God's spirit dwelling within them (1 Cor. 6:10). They belong to the body of Christ, and that changes their own 'bodiliness'. We could also say that their bodies are changed" (Bieler and Schattroff 25%). In the breaking of the bread and even as far back as the crushing of the grapes and the rising of the dough, God is breaking apart this world in order to commune with humanity. Yet much like in the crushing of grapes and making and breaking of bread, while something is being destroyed, there is also, simultaneously,

something being created. It is in that moment that bodies are changed physically by this taking of the elements and experience that connection with God as a gift from God. This is, as often as it is participated in, an act of creation, literally bringing people into God's image and Christ's body through the changing of their own bodies. This is the climactic moment of the liturgy, the momentary fulfillment of the eschatological hope that all will be welcomed to the table, and the event in which humanity is made new, physically, by the taking of this sacrament.

Within the Eucharist, even the best of theologians cannot fathom what God is doing, and yet God gives this moment as a gift to everyone. This is not an event that one can understand rationally, but instead is something that each person physically engages with bodily in order to recognize that, "the Eucharist is much more than a ritual repetition of the past. It is rather a literal re-membering of Christ's body. A knitting together of the body of Christ by the participation of many in his sacrifice" (Cavanaugh). Eucharist is meant to engage particular bodies in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and ultimately Christ's body that is both physical and communal. This deconstruction of Christ's body simultaneously deconstructs who we are and creates us as a new body, as we are in our particularity, in the greater body of Christ. This paradox is deeply important to Disability theology.

When taking the Eucharist, whether that be moving ourselves towards a communal bread and wine that is Christ's body, reaching out to grab it, placing it in one's mouth or in one's hand, or chewing and swallowing the bread and wine, we are engaging in community in a bodily way that can only happen in the presence of God. This is a fully new understanding of what it means to take bread and wine into ourselves because the paradox lies in that while one takes it in as they would other food, the elements serve to take them in instead. In ordinary eating and drinking, human beings take food or sustenance into their bodies (through mouth or feeding

tube) in order to sustain their life and body. This often gets wrapped up into not only the consumption of the actual nutrients into bodies, but the consumption of food in order to make one's body a certain way. This form of eating that people engage in daily is often communicated with the goal of making one healthy, likely attempting to live up to that Platonic standard. To eat the food is with a goal of consumption to a particular end. The Eucharist, however, is undoing the ways that eating is thought about and reversing them. Instead of bread and wine being consumed, the Eucharist is taking in humanity into one Body with the particularity of each individual. To engage in the Eucharist is to engage in opening and letting go of oneself and engaging in a deconstruction into particularized community of God. This lack of consumption is a central part of the Eucharist in that it flips the goal of the life-sustaining practice of eating into something that lets go of ideals and concepts of perfection and health and longevity, and instead engages in the broken body of God in a world that can only feel it for a fleeting moment. There is nothing about the bread and wine that are attempting to make one's body healthy in a Platonic sense. In fact, more accurately, "the beauty of our preparation, for the Eucharist has no practical use. But Romano Guardini has spoken wisely of this useless beauty" (Schmemmann 16%). The "useless beauty" of the Eucharist is pushing against usefulness of consumption. To consume food in order to gain bodily health is beside the point if not against the point of the Communion table. Instead, what happens is a reversal of consumption and while people take in the elements they are undoing consumption itself in order to be more fully in communion with God and others. If the Eucharist was for the purpose that we consume and metabolize food in order to take it into our own body, instead of being brought into a larger body, the central foods would indicate that. When one takes bread and wine into themselves, the nutritional elements of sugars, carbohydrates, and alcohol are not intended to do anything for their body.

Instead, the point is not ideals of health and wellness, but engaging in the breaking of a body in order to bring together the world. To recognize the particular limits of one's body and enter into community around that is fundamental to Disability Justice, and to enter profoundly into the limits of the actual body of God in order to be fully made new in our particularity in a wider community as the body of Christ is the foundation of Eucharist. Suddenly, the argument is not just to include Disabled people in communion practices, and not leave us sitting in the hallway, but instead, Disability Justice becomes linked to a fuller understanding of what Eucharist means. We are not just important as guests at the table, but fully provide a greater hope for what the Eucharist means and who God is in particularity.

It is in this that God breaks into Disabled lives and Disability Justice and not only makes it a new creation, but creates out of it more of God's own image for love in the world. In this Eucharistic moment we realize that, "the great Eucharistic prayer is now summed up in the Lord's Prayer, each petition of which implies the total and complete dedication to God's kingdom in the world. It is His prayer, and he gave it to us, made it our prayer, as He made His father our father. No one has been 'worthy' to receive communion, no one has been prepared for it. At this point all merits, all righteousness, all devotions disappear and dissolve. Life comes again to us as a gift, a free and divine Gift. This is why in the Orthodox Church we call the Eucharist elements Holy Gifts" (Schmemmann 26%). This gift of God is not complete without everyone, because we cannot understand what it means that Christ is Embodied Love until we relate as the Body of Christ in this Eucharistic moment, as particular embodied beings. That moment in community is where hope, love, justice and God are found.

Amen

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