

BODY OF PROOF

MATTHEW 27:62-66

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.”

So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

“Body of Proof” was a television series that aired from 2011-2013. The story is about Dr. Megan Hunt, formerly a brilliant neurosurgeon, who was banished from the operating room, when she suffered a tragic automobile accident. Dr. Megan resurrects her career as a medical examiner. No longer does she use her expertise to save lives, but she examines victims and their cause of death to help bring answers and closure to their loved ones.

As the doctor says in one of the inaugural shows, “If you look close enough the body reveals all the answers.” And the body of Jesus also provided us all the answers.

When Jesus was taken off the cross *His* was **the body of proof**. That’s why the Jews who hated and crucified Jesus, did all they could to keep that body tucked away in a tomb, sealed

with stone, even guarded by military troops. *His body would be the ultimate proof.*

It's interesting the apprehension that lingered in the minds of Jesus' enemies even after they succeeded in mocking His claims and extinguishing His life. Matthew 27 tells us what happened on the Saturday afterwards.

We *commemorate* Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday. We *celebrate* His resurrection on Easter Sunday. But between those two days there was an uneasy, doubt-filled Saturday when precautions were taken. The Jews had *contemplated* what Jesus said, and remembered His words. Words that even His own followers had forgotten. Jesus had stated, *"After three days I will rise."*

Apparently, His enemies believed Him more than His friends. So, against all odds, the Jews anticipated their reaction in the event that Jesus pulled a rabbit out of His hat and did what none of them thought he could do. He had surprised them countless times before with the miraculous. Now they were unwilling to put anything past Him. None of them admitted He could actually rise, but they invented a counter explanation just in case He did.

That's why they paid a visit to the Praetorium to solicit the help of Governor Pilate. The Jews suggested maybe the disciples would launch a ruse - a con to bolster Jesus' claim as Messiah. His men might come at night, steal the corpse; then report He'd risen from the dead.

I'm sure they didn't really believe this could happen. The Jews had informants, intelligence sources spying on the disciples.

They knew at that moment Jesus' men were hiding in the shadows for fear of suffering the same fate as their Lord. No way, would they come out into the open to try such a risky maneuver. They were laying low.

And notice what the Jews didn't suggest... No one claimed Jesus simply swooned, He fell unconscious due to a loss of blood and the trauma of crucifixion. Later skeptics will make that claim, but it never crossed the minds of the men who witnessed His suffering firsthand, and saw His body taken off the cross. They couldn't deny the obvious. **His body was proof of His death.**

The Jewish leaders who were jealous of Jesus knew possession of that body was crucial to them controlling the narrative. As long as they possessed Jesus' corpse no one would believe He'd risen from the dead. Thus, their request of Pontus Pilate - *"let's seal Him up tight."*

And Pilate agreed. First, he rolled a stone over the mouth of the tomb. It was a heavy stone - chiseled to fit into the channel running across the tomb's opening. The stone and channel clamped down like a lock nut...

Pilate then issued an order and sealed the stone. He attached a waxed seal - the official insignia of Rome. If broken, the perpetrator would risk execution. It was a symbol of the most powerful human authority on Earth.

They rolled a stone, sealed a stone, and finally posted next to the stone a military detachment. Armed soldiers stood guard to protect the tomb from tampering. The frightened disciples wouldn't dare approach now. Jesus' body was buried behind obstacles, authority, and force.

But none of these three - *not physical obstacles, or human authority, or military force* are stronger than the resurrection power of Jesus! For three days after He was crucified, the body they had tried to control broke free.

Like a bird escaping from its cage, *the body of Jesus pried loose from the clutches of Satan, shed the penalty of sin, overcame death, defeated the grave, and frightened off the guard dispatched to seal the tomb.* The body they thought was under tabs - on a cold slab and locked away forever - came bounding from the grave.

Pilate rolled the stone to seal Jesus up tight, but God rolled the stone back to let the world see that Jesus was alive. **This world offers promises full of emptiness, but Easter offers emptiness full of promises.** The empty tomb promises hope, and life, and a better world.

But here's my point, **the body of Jesus controlled the narrative.** The Jews knew it, Pilate knew it, God certainly knew it... **the body controlled the narrative.**

See an empty tomb - behold a risen body - and faith was alive... But produce a dead Jesus, present a corpse for the world to examine, *and Christianity was dead* - a fairytale start with a brutal ending, a plane shot down on take-off. If the body didn't rise, folks would never believe.

It's interesting, that over the years many of Christianity's detractors have attacked the faith at this very point, **they deny Jesus' bodily resurrection.** Oh, they might believe He rose in spirit. That the life force of Jesus is now alive in the world today.

The doubters say it doesn't matter that His body remains in the grave.

The late Episcopal Bishop, John Shelby Spong, was a Christian in name only. He was actually a heretical priest who tried to untether the Christian faith from the Bible, and the traditional creeds of the Church. He sought to create a progressive, humanistic version of Christianity that denied miracles and the supernatural. Spong said that faith in the Bible - in "revealed truth" - required the twisting of a 21st century mind into a pretzel.

Here's what Spong said about the Easter miracle, "I don't think the Resurrection has anything to do with physical resuscitation. I think it means the life of Jesus was raised back into the life of God, not into the life of this world, and that it was out of this that His presence - not His body - "was manifested to certain witnesses."

The heretical priest says that Jesus rose spiritually and returned to God, but in the physical world all that occurred was the start of a vibe, an optimism. His grave was still intact. His body was still on ice. There was no literal, historical resurrection. Jesus' body was still dead.

Yet, the Bible itself and the Apostle Paul warned us about heresies spouted by men like Bishop Spong.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:14-17, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ... And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" Paul is saying

if there is no literal, actual, bodily resurrection there is no Christianity.

If Jesus' body still lies in the grave; *then the devil still holds the victory, and sin has no solution, and death is still enforce, and the grave is a stopping point not a pitstop.* So again, **His body controls the narrative.**

The truth of the body's importance was hammered home to me recently in a very emotional, and visceral, and gut-wrenching way. Most of you are familiar with my oldest son's recent battle with Covid-19. Zach was in a drug-induced coma from January 7th through February 3rd. For almost a month his body was asleep. We were unable to communicate with him in any meaningful way.

And for a lot of that time we watched him get worse. First there was swelling and a terrible rash. Then came a mysterious fever that came and went. At times His heart beat so fast it acted like it would pound out of his chest.

And we had no idea what damage had occurred or was being done. I dreaded the cat-scans, and the pictures we looked at of his horribly-scarred lungs. The guesses the doctors made about the possibility of brain damage drove me crazy, *and damaged my own brain.*

The last Saturday in January I spent all day by Zach's bedside. I knew his body was alive, but it seemed like he was a corpse. I wasn't sure whether I'd ever get my son back. On the way home I called the elders of our church and asked for their prayers. It was a really tough day.

But my Saturday was nothing compared to the disciples' Saturday. Imagine, these men knew the body of Jesus was a corpse. *I wondered if my son was alive inside*, but they knew their Lord was dead. The condition of Zach's body controlled the narrative in my life. And I'm sure the body of Jesus dictated the faith of His disciples.

His followers had a promise that Jesus would rise the third day, but that's hard to believe when the body you see is dead. And likewise, I believed God to be a good God. I prayed with all my heart for Him to heal my son, but it's hard on a heart, and it's difficult to have faith, when you're staring at a body that just won't wake up.

To finish my story, the next week Zach got worse. The doctors weaned him from the medicines, but his coma persisted. On that next Wednesday the doctor called to prepare us for the worst. The last line of his report read, *"I am worried that he may not recover from this illness."*

Just before I hung up the phone, I asked, *"Doctor, what would you need to see happen in order to give Zach a positive prognosis?"* He said, *"Two things... First, he needs to wake up. And second, his breathing needs to improve."* Well, the rest of that Wednesday and into Thursday I wrestled and prayed for God to wake Zach, and help him breathe. The only peace I could find was to put my son into the hands of God and leave him there!

And low and behold, it was Thursday afternoon when Zach opened his eyes. He woke up. It was as if God had said to me and our family, *"I've chosen for Zach to live."*

My wife the nurse was still worried. She was not as excited to see Zach wake up as I was, and her concerns were warranted. Being awake created new challenges for him, but for me when my son's body seemingly came back to life it boosted my faith. It was easier for me to believe. I felt I now had a promise from God I could trust.

Zach's animated body was now **a body of proof**. God was not through with him. He still had purposes for Zach.

I'll never forget two weeks later when they plugged Zach's trachea to let him speak. It was the first time we'd heard our son's voice in six weeks. We didn't know if he still had his voice, or if his mind worked well enough to use his voice. **(Let me share the moment with you...)**

When I heard my son belt out, **"My name is Zach Adams,"** I wept like a baby. It was tears of joy. I think it surprised Zach. We now knew he would preach again. But here's my point, **"the body controlled the narrative."**

And this was the experience of Jesus' disciples. When their Lord rose from the dead, **His body was the body of proof!** They could touch the scars in His hands and in His side. When they saw His risen body they believed!

For three-and-a-half years Jesus' body had performed miracles, **now they knew His body was the miracle.**

And for the next forty days His body was seen by the disciples in various places and at various times. Each sighting bolstered their faith. Every time their faith grew stronger. It was the appearance of the body that was slain, then rose, that stirred their hearts and fortified their faith. **The risen body of Jesus was the body of proof.**

At the end of those forty days Jesus took His disciples to a mountain outside Jerusalem, and on the Mount of Olives they watched Jesus' body ascend into heaven.

We're told in John 20:29 that days earlier, Jesus had said to one of His disciples, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus was speaking of us. Thomas and His first disciples believed because they saw. Yet we have not seen, yet believe.

In a sense, we're more blessed than the first disciples. You and I believe having never seen the body of Jesus!

But wait! Is that true? Is that really true? Haven't we seen the body of Jesus? Haven't you interacted with the body of Christ in our world today? Let's think again...

Yes, the literal, actual, resurrected body of Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of God going to bat for us. He's pleading, and praying, and petitioning the Father for us.

Yet in another sense, we have seen a tangible expression of Jesus' body in the world today. Our faith is influenced by His body - that is, His body **"the Church."**

In 1 Corinthians 12:27 Paul speaks to the believers in Corinth, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." *Where have we seen the body of Jesus?* Well, look around you this morning, **we are His body!** The people sitting next to you are His hands and feet.

And the body of Christ is still the body of proof!

Jesus is still on the move in our world today. He still has work to do and miracles to perform. But in going and doing He uses us. **He moves through our feet. He touches through our hands. He speaks through our lips.**

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul says we're all members of His body, and each of us has a specific function. No two believers are redundant. We all have a special place, and when we're led by His Spirit, and work together we make up the beautiful and powerful **body of Christ.**

Yet sadly, over the last two years of the world-wide pandemic, in some places the body of Jesus has been left for dead and buried. For the last two years many believers rolled the stone over the mouth of the tomb, and hid from the virus. At times people stopped going to church in person, and were online worshippers only.

Last Easter a Pew Research survey revealed that only 40% of Christians attended an in-person church service.

And listen carefully, I can understand! I've wondered if I had been more cautious could it have saved my son all that he's been through the last four months? I'm a pastor who's now been impacted by this tragedy in as personal a way as possible. Caution is definitely warranted.

That's why here at Calvary CSM we're committed to providing a mask-only section of seating in our sanctuary... And live-streaming is now a permanent part of our ministry. For a variety of reasons the live-stream is a convenient and healthy option for people. Folks who are elderly, or sick, or at work, or traveling, or out of town can still join us online. I'm thankful for the technology.

But I'm also a pastor who reads my Bible, and there is an inescapable calling on Christians, and Christian communities, to be *the body of Christ* in our world today.

For just as Christianity would've died in its infancy without a body, the resurrected body of Jesus - likewise even in the 21st century the witness of Jesus is still incomplete without His Body. You and I, His Church, are now the living, breathing, touchable, audible, even resurrected body of Jesus. As we've learned in Romans 6 we died with Christ and rose with Him. Resurrection power now flows through us. We are **His body of proof**.

I'll never forget speaking to a pastor friend of mine right after the pandemic hit and churches began broadcasting their services online only. He told me how much he was enjoying the people-less format. For him less people meant less problems. He said as long as folks kept sending in their offering he was fine with the arrangement and hoped it continued. I couldn't believe what was coming out of his mouth. He'd totally thrown shade on the body of Christ - **it is the body of proof!**

At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus' body... To save us, on the cross Jesus had to die a physical death, again a body was necessary... Then to prove He was who He said He was, Jesus needed to overcome death. Thus, He had to rise bodily... And He has promised to come again, not just in spirit. His body will split the eastern sky and come in the clouds...

And just as the body of Jesus is necessary to fulfill all these doctrines of Christianity, it is also needed today if the Church is

going to be, and do, and go, and satisfy the purposes God intends. **A body still drives the narrative.** Christianity is not Christianity, Church is not Church, discipleship is not discipleship without His body.

The term “church” used in the New Testament is the Greek word “ecclesia” - which literally means “the called out ones.” It implies a gathering or assembling of people.

Of course, that’s what exists on a Zoom call, or in the comments section of a livestream - and again, please understand I’m not against the use of these online tools. But you can no more reproduce a real church body online, anymore than you can substitute a spiritual resurrection for a real, bonafide, bodily resurrection.

There are online churches today that offer communion and baptism through digital avatars. For me, that’s a bridge too far. When I eat the bread I crunch it between my teeth to remind me of the grinding the body of Jesus endured. I look for my reflection in the swirl of the wine as I put it to my lips. Communion reminds of the real-world sacrifice Jesus made for me. As in the case of my son, in the physical presence of a body my experience is more visceral, more emotional, more impactful. Something gets lost in the virtual worship of cyberspace.

It’s interesting to me that in the Old Testament when the Hebrews were told to worship and sacrifice to God they were required to leave their houses and journey to the Temple. They were required to “go up” to Jerusalem..

And often this journey was risky. Depending on where they lived the pilgrims had to travel many miles and traverse dangerous terrain - even endure the threat of robbery and flash floods. Yet remaining at home and participating symbolically or remotely was not an option.

There was something about the rubbing shoulders with random neighbors... the journey exposed you to tribes and people groups with whom you didn't normally see or associate with - and this indiscriminate clumping together of different people was important in God's mind.

Apparently, the impact this made on the worshipper was a needed part of their worship and spiritual growth.

In contrast, the problem with online worship is it doesn't force you to do anything inconvenient or taxing. Rather than encourage you to sit next to someone who doesn't look like you, or smells odd, you can worship and study from a distance. You can choose isolation.

I just think that's why God told Israel to go up to the Temple. In a multitude of ways it pushed them outside of their comfort zone. And God knew that a big part of worship is being pushed outside of our comfort zone...

This is why He required the same of the New Testament Hebrews. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching." Stirring up and exhorting **can** be done online, but body to body to body creates a more genuine and visible expression.

Recently, I read an article in the New York Times, of all places, entitled, “[What We Lose When We Livestream Church.](#)” Author Collin Hansen writes, “The body of Christ, or church, isn’t the same when you separate its members. The hands and feet and ears and eyes need to be assembled for this body to work for the good of all.”

Hansen admits that *actual church* is not as convenient as the *virtual version*. You can go to online church in your PJs, or before your daughter’s travel soccer game, or on the way home from your lake house. But there is much we lose when we abandon the nitty-gritty of on-site, buns in the seats, shoulder to shoulder church.

The article goes on to suggest believers need to hear babies crying in the nursery - *it reminds them of the church’s next generation...* They need to see Bobbie Jo’s friend they’ve been praying for walk in with Bobbie Jo - *it shouts to us that God is still answering prayers...*

Rather than click your mouse after a few minutes and log onto another church’s livestream, we should be forced to hear the musician hit a sour note or sing a bit out of tune - or listen to a sermon that may not be the pastor’s best - *for both are subtle reminders that God uses imperfect instruments...* We need to bump into the guy who’s hungover, but came that morning out of guilt. *He could use someone to extend to him some grace...*

We need to be there when the homeless person sits quietly through the service only to afterwards ask for a little help... We need to **taste** the bread and wine... And feel the anticipation in

the room at the beginning of a service... Or the tension in the air during the altar call...

We need to be there to applaud when a new believer rises from the baptismal waters, and loud enough for them to hear us... We need the sensation of fighting back the natural embarrassment we feel when we raise our hands in praise... I need the embrace of your hand squeezing my hand, or at least your knuckles rubbing my knuckles - *it reminds me that the body of Christ is not just theoretical. It really is a body with hands and feet!*

It reminds me of the old grandpa who could no longer hear or see, yet he attended church every single Sunday. One day his kids questioned him, “Gramps, why do you still go to church. You don’t see anyone. You don’t hear anything. It just seems you’re wasting time.”

That’s when the old man answered, “*The reason I go to church is I want everyone to know who’s side I’m on.*”

And I think this speaks a great truth. There is *an accountability* that exists, and *a witness* that’s expressed when your car rolls out of your driveway on Sundays and heads to church. Neighbors see. They take notice. Over time they put two and two together. It’s accountability for you, and a witness to them, and it really does matter.

For the six weeks in March and April 2020 when we shut down our in-person services it didn’t take long before new and younger believers to begin to struggle. They missed the accountability and the camaraderie of just being together with like-minded people. Church served as a reminder that they weren’t in it alone. That they were part of a family, a real

community of faith. And over time this is a remembrance that all Christians need.

In fact, the Body of Christ, the Church, is what the whole world needs! Imagine a world without this **body of proof**, just a church online, meeting in the webs of cyberspace. *Would we touch as many lives? Could we show as much love? Would our impact be as tangible and effective?* I don't think so. Remember, Jesus served people and washed their feet. He knocked off the street dust and pointed them to a better way. *How is that done without a body that can stoop, and lift, and lend a hand?*

Oh, we can broadcast sermons on the internet, but again something is lost when the world can't see people living out those sermons in imperfect, but sincere ways.

How do you look people in the eye and tell them the truth in love without a body that enables that form of communication? Texting and You Tube won't bandage wounds and heal hurts. If it did God would've emailed us, or logged us onto a website; instead He became one of us. He sent us Jesus, **a body**, to teach us physically and tangibly. A big part of Christianity is the ministry of presence. It's how healing occurs and love is conveyed.

There is a lost world out there (*and it's getting more and more lost by the minute*) that doesn't share our Christian worldview, nor does it relate to God in truth. If this world is to believe in the risen Christ it needs to see **His Body**. We need to be Jesus' hands and feet and tongue. As individuals on a daily basis, but also together, you and I need to be the living Lord's **body of proof**.

Remember, when you purchased Christmas gifts for your children, and the packaging read, “Some assembly required...” Well, the same is true for the Church!

Yes, online tools and virtual meetings can be used on occasion. I appreciate their convenience. **But some assembly is still required.** Together we are a body, the body of Christ, and **His body** still drives the narrative.

If I stood here today and declared that Jesus has risen in spirit - whether or not His body came back doesn't really matter - you'd storm the pulpit and throw me out on my ear, *and rightly so*. But to a lesser degree some of us have said in regards to the Church, that it's the Spirit of Christ that matters, and whether or not the body comes back is secondary. *I suggest that's just as false!*

Just as the risen Christ was **the body of proof** for first century believers. Today, the Church serves as **the body of proof** for 21st century believers. In the first century people didn't believe unless they saw His body, and folks today won't believe without seeing the Body of Christ.

As we're told in 1 John 3:14, “**We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.**” The evidence of Jesus' resurrection power in the world today is the love we express to one another.

As Collin Hansen concludes in his New York Times op-ed, “The church wasn’t just a bridge of 2,000 years until humanity reached Peak Zoom. Gathering in person is essential for the religion where God took on flesh and dwelt among us. It’s essential in a faith that believes Jesus physically rose from the dead and then sat down to enjoy a meal with stunned friends.” And a physically gathered Church is essential if we’re going to fulfill our mission and share the Gospel with the folks around us.

This is what many people in our society forgot in the weeks that followed the initial coronavirus outbreak.

Let’s not forget it next time. Let’s be cautious medically and socially responsible so as not to spread a contagion. But equally so, let’s not forget that **some assembly is required.** Our gathering together is definitely essential.

The Church is the body of our living Lord. Folks learn of Him by looking at us. Some people will never know the risen Christ if we don’t take seriously our calling to be His feet and hands. Let’s celebrate the risen Jesus by being **His body... His body of proof** to a needy world.