



2021

B O D Y W O R K

RACELESS

GOSPEL

S E A S O N 2

LISTENER GUIDE

STARLETTE THOMAS

TRACKLIST

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GOOD FAITH MEDIA



Welcome

to The Raceless Gospel podcast, which is interrupting your regularly scheduled church programming by talking about that taboo trinity—race, religion and politics. Season two's theme is bodywork and we are calling for all body parts to assemble here. The Apostle Paul is clear:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (First Corinthians 12:12-13, NRSV)

One, the number is a tight squeeze. We won't be able to add our divisions.

We say, “We are the hands and feet of Christ.” Not found in the Bible, it is perhaps inspired by the words of St. Teresa of Avila who wrote:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

But it is all busywork unless you can show your work. Let me see how you worked out the world's problems and while we're at it, “What's not working for the body of Christ?” Where is the body hurting? We've got to examine ourselves. Because the church is harming itself and it's going to cost us more than an arm and a leg to heal what has been broken.

Still, let me see a show of hands for those who want to help me save the church—from itself. Denominations are in decline. Baptisms are down. The membership is getting grayer—though it keeps dying its roots. “Bricks, butts and the budget,” this alliteration is now a eulogy. Because it didn't tell Jesus' story and it's not what really counts anymore for a generation that chooses a relationship with him over our Sunday morning religion.

No better and no worse off than the generations before them, they are sure that this is not how Christ's body works. Baptismal water and whatever is in the Spirit's cup, we must drink up or shut up about unity and the ministry of reconciliation. Still segregated, we hate parts of our own body and we don't talk about it because some folks get all worked up.

Others say, “Don't ask me. I just work here.” But responses like these no longer apply. This is why, in each episode, my guests and I flesh it out. We talk it out. Hard conversations, they take work. Because we want to talk about it until it is all in a day's work. Join us as we talk about body image, body cameras, body language, body count, the body politic, being body positive, what it means to be the body of Christ and of course, our bodywork.

Call & Response.

After each episode of the podcast, you are invited to listen deeply to what the Spirit is saying to you and to lean into where the Spirit is drawing you. If you have the ears to hear it, this 'kin-dom' coming, then you have a heart for and the mind to bring it into being. Respond to the words that are calling you to make them flesh.

For me, it was and remains the raceless gospel. It is my life's message: We cannot color in the face of God. Jesus didn't come to save our skin but our soul. And the Spirit is not limited to our corner of the world.

Each episode is an exercise in deconstructing, calling into question those things that don't add up and the acts of the North American church that don't measure up to Jesus' words; mulling over and picking at the words that always get stuck in your teeth; and questioning those words that bear witness to a feeling, a gnawing and perhaps, a calling—faithfully.

Jesus' gospel is not a Sunday morning religion but it is bodywork to be done every day of the week. For some, my guests and I are just tinkering around. But for others, it will sound like banging and clanging. The words will begin to ring in your ears until it is crystal clear that God is calling you to respond with your body to do the work that heals us. Because partisan politics, patriarchy, misogyny, bigotry, race and its progeny have created a world of hurt.

Read the scripture slowly, identifying the words that stick out, that protrude long after you have read them. Pay attention to them as they are trying to say more to you.

Read the prayer and then keep talking to God. My prayer is only for starters.

Answer the questions honestly. Do this bodywork as faithfully as you know how. I pray that the words of scripture would poke out, that the answers to this prayer would jump out, that your bodywork would come into focus and would so enliven your being that you would shout it out like John the Baptist, "Prepare the way..." Amen.

Episode 1. Bodywork.

Scripture. First Corinthians 12:14-20 (NRSV).

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as (God) chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

Prayer.

Divinity dressed in flesh, making a mess of our neat understandings of You, give me ears to hear what the Spirit is saying and to follow in Jesus' footsteps to see what You are up to. Because I am up to my neck in questions. Loose my tongue of answers that don't address the real problem and then give me the audacious courage to become the answer to prayers for equality, justice, fairness and visibility. Amen.

Bodywork.

1. The Jesus we meet in Scripture is so often not who we see in church on Sunday morning. What is the bodywork of the North American church to clear up the discrepancies?
2. More than saying the right things, Jesus' words are incarnational. Word made flesh, how does your theological understanding of the body work for and against the injustices and to bring order to our society?
3. There is a lot of bodywork to be done and in this first episode, we talk about Christian nationalism, patriarchy, sexism, racism and their progeny. What word(s) were you created to enflesh? What is your body's work?

"The history of Christianity and the body is one of anxiety and unease; Christianity has the words to offer a spirituality of the body but the church hasn't always spoken those words."

| Lauren F. Winner,
Mudhouse Sabbath

Episode 2. Body Conscious.

Scripture. Romans 12:1- 2 (NRSV).

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Prayer.

God, my conscious, who knows me intimately and yet, does not make me feel bad about myself, I confess that I am good. We are all good—not based on how we feel, how we look or the rating system of public opinion. We are good because You say that we are, created good, naturally good, innately good (Genesis 1.31). Now make me conscious of all the words and the ways that I make others not feel and believe that they are good. Amen.

Bodywork.

1. Think about the story of your body. How did you come to know it? Who introduced to it? What was said and how did/ does it make you feel?
2. In the second episode, we discuss patriarchy, race and traditional gender norms. What is your body conscious of? How have these constructs informed your understanding of body and belonging?
3. A work in progress, how can the North American church cultivate a healthy sense of awareness? What would it mean for our bodies?
4. When are you most conscious that your body is evidence of God's good work?

"A person becomes conscious of (themselves); the urge to know, to understand, to find answers, turns inward. Every estimate of others becomes a question of self-estimate, every judgment upon life becomes a self-judgment. The question of the meaning of one's self becomes one with the meaning of life.

| Howard Thurman,
The Inward Journey

Episode 3. **Body Image.**

Scripture. Genesis 1:26a (NRSV).

“And God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...’”

Prayer.

God, who is not made of stone or wood, who does not come in small, medium and large or our favorite color, remind us that You are mystery. Sight unseen and yet fully present in Jesus, Word made flesh and skin in the game, proven on Calvary, I give thanks that You came in Person to see me. In Jesus, You are divinity eye-to-eye, God in the neighborhood. Forgive me for reducing You to a 4 x 6, an 8 x 10, an 11 x 14 sized image. I repent for thinking that I could frame You, contain You to one image. Amen.

“We need the courage to create ourselves daily.”

| Maya Angelou

Bodywork.

1. We say, “Bodies comes in all sizes and shapes.” But is this the true measurement of our human being? Rulers and red tape, what do our measurements really mean about our understanding of human being and belonging?
2. In episode three, we discuss the image of Jesus. What is your image of Jesus? Who created him? Where did he come from?
3. What do you need to see in Jesus’ physicality in order to believe in him as Savior, Lord, Son of God and why? What does this image mean to you?
4. “Face of an angel,” how does Jesus’ physical form, his body image influence and inform your understanding of salvation?
5. “Word made flesh,” what lowercase word do you imagine is associated with Jesus’ flesh most often and why?

Episode 4. **Body Positive.**

Scripture. Psalm 139:14a (NRSV).

“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Prayer.

Glory! Hallelujah! Thank You, God, for creating me. Thank You, God for my body, for my hands and feet, my toes and elbows, my eyes and ears and nose and mouth, for the parts I love and the parts I am learning to love. Help me to accept all of me, “warts and all” and not exist as a fraction of myself. Empower me to focus on the positive and to see myself as You see me, “fearfully and wonderfully made” in Your boundless and indescribable image. Amen.

“I prefer to be my true self, even at the expense of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false and incur my own abhorrence.”

| Frederick Douglass

Bodywork.

1. Look at you. Look at you! What do you see? What feature stands out? What part of your body do you focus on positively?
2. All created with the same stuff, why do we make up some of the differences between our bodies?
3. Christians are positive that God created all bodies. Is your understanding of the body and all of its variations, positive or negative? Why?
4. In this episode, we discuss the meanings we give our bodies and the meanings our bodies are given according to the Christian faith, the sociopolitical construct of race and gender, how we are taught to see ourselves and others and what we can say to ensure that we are all body positive. It's a tall order.

What is the North American church's work to ensure that all human beings, all made in the image of God, see themselves positively? What can you say and do differently to promote body positivity?

Episode 5. **Body Count.**

Scripture. Exodus 20.13 (NRSV).

“You shall not murder.”

Prayer.

God who gives life, I confess that I am so far away from You and what counts: grace and mercy, truth and justice, faith, hope and love. Your body made flesh in Jesus doesn't count for much since I crucify it again in the flesh of my siblings and Your next of kin. Won't You remind me of who we are in You?

Because I crossed my heart and was supposed to die with Christ in those baptismal waters but I am troubled by them. Because walking with Jesus calls me to walk in deeper meanings for living and calls into question how I can sleep through Rachel weeping. Help me to believe that all bodies count. Amen.

“For some people, the second Amendment is as holy as the great commandment, so it warrants a closer look.”

| Shane Claiborne,
Beating Guns

Bodywork.

1. When meeting death, we all know that we have “an appointed time.” But what of death prematurely assigned through gun violence and the death penalty? What purpose does death serve in these instances? Each year, what are you learning as we count these bodies?
2. In this episode, we discuss the politics of death, the meaning of the death penalty, thoughts, prayers and gun violence in America. Gun owners and victims of gun violence, for and against the death penalty, Christians are a mixed bag. What do our weapons bear witness to? What does the reality of gun violence and the death penalty say about the human story? About how we resolve conflict and seek justice?
3. The North American church worships a crucified savior but some members of his body believe in the death penalty. How did his believers move from his cross to the crowd, screaming, “Execute him”?

Episode 6. **Body Camera.**

Scripture. Amos 5:21-24 (NRSV).

“I hate, I despise your festivals and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not

accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Prayer.

God, help me to see this spiritual life from the right angle and to see the biggest picture framed to include all God's children. I pray that I be found in the right light, on and off camera. As the body of Christ, may his body be arrested, may his feet be found protesting, may his body bear witness to injustice wherever and whenever it is found. Amen.

Bodywork.

1. In episode six, we discuss police brutality, the use of cameras in the work of visibility and discipleship that practices accountability. Cameras provide an extra set of "eyes" but too often do not change the way we see people in exchanges with law enforcement. Say their names. Ahmaud Arbery. Breonna Taylor. George Floyd. ...
2. In his book *Who Will Be a Witness? Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love and Deliverance*, Drew Hart asks a series of questions worth repeating:

"Are we a community that makes manifest the delivering presence of God in our neighborhood? What formative practices do we lead our people through that would help them know and join the justice of God in their everyday mundane routines? Do our sermons, Bible studies, prayer time, distribution of resources, budgets, programming, song selection, public witness, church polity and leadership gesture people toward the liberation of God in our world or toward the status quo? How does our church relate to the social order?"¹

"If God is a God of justice, then worshipping communities that radically reorganize their lives to the reality of the Most High God will increasingly, and inevitably, begin participating in the revolutionary vocation of the church."

| Drew Hart, *Who Will Be a Witness?*

Episode 7. Body Politic.

Scripture. Ephesians chapter 4:4-7 (NRSV).

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and (Parent) of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”

Prayer.

God, the equal opportunity Trinity, teach us how to live in mutual support of each other. Because I crossed my heart and was supposed to die with Christ in those baptismal waters. Since Jesus didn't die for the status quo, baptism is not an opportunity to rinse and repeat. Instead, it is an overwhelming flood that drowns out all that I am while connecting me to who I was created to be. God, help my unbelief and empower us to become the community we have not seen. Amen.

Bodywork.

1. In this episode, we discuss the politics of Jesus, the role of the Christian faith in the public square and the church in North America's responsibility, perceived or otherwise, for civilization and the social order. In your estimation, what is the purpose of the government for Christian believers?
2. Robert's Rules of Order, Romans 13, institutional religion, partisan politics, social unrest, Christian nationalism and a 'kin-dom' coming, the members of the body of Christ in North America are not unified in its understanding of governing or the role of the American government. How do Christian believers then practice healthy and wholistic political engagement?
3. H. Richard Niebuhr writes in *Christ and Culture* about Jesus' relationship with culture as an enduring problem. What is your view of Christ's relationship with culture (e.g. "Christ against culture," "Christ of culture," "Christ above culture," "Christ transforming culture") and how does this position inform your politics? What is your body work for the body politic?

“The soul of our politics is the commitment to ending domination.”

| bell hooks

Episode 8. **Body Language.**

Scripture. John 1:1 (NRSV).

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Prayer.

Blabber-mouth God, who need not hold Your tongue or bite it, whose words are good, true and ever-expanding, whose letters don't come together to choke the life out of us, it is to You that I pray for a new tongue that expands my lungs and the Spirit's work in the world. Talk my ears off with new visions and new dreams. Talk to me until I learn a new body language and embody a new community in preparation for a 'kin-dom' coming. Amen.

Bodywork.

1. Paul says, "In him, we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17.28, NRSV). But how hard it remains for Jesus' disciples to read his body language though written in red. The message is inconsistent for those experiencing homelessness and poverty, the minoritized and marginalized. What could our body language suggest about Jesus' presence and ministry?
2. In the final episode, we discuss the language of faith and what has been lost in interpretation due to American slavery, colonialism and Christian nationalism. What has this body language communicated?
3. We behave as if God's body is our little project, that God does not have it all together. We believe that God is missing pieces that we have around here somewhere, that God is not a finished work and requires some assembly. And this is the reason why we come to church—to fix God's body—instead of changing our language. What do you say about that? What does your body language say about yourself, your neighbor, your God? This is your body work.

"I have always wanted to be me without making it difficult for you to be you."

| Howard Thurman,
The Search for Common Ground

End notes

¹ Drew G.I. Hart, *Justice, Love and 2020*, 221.



Who Will Be a Witness? Igniting Activism for God's Deliverance, (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press,