



# ST BART'S

Sermon by

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## The God We Need

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, April 18, 2021*

*The Third Sunday of Easter*

*Based on Luke 24:36b-48*

*Let us break bread together on our knees.*

*Let us break bread together on our knees.*

*When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun*

*O Lord have mercy on me.*

We do not get the God we want. We get the God we need.

I do not necessarily want the God who comes among us poor, weak, born in a manger on the underside of empire. The one who offends respectable people and clashes with temple authorities—basically the bishops and canons—at every turn.

What do you do with a God who speaks in riddles, tells people he's going to die soon? A God who won't let his followers proclaim him Lord out loud? Who suffers and dies hideously on a cross between common criminals?

I do not want the God who stays in that tomb for three excruciating days. Who rises miraculously from the dead... still bears wounds in his hands and feet. The God who answers oppression and trauma with love. I do not understand this God or want this God. But I do need him.

The disciples didn't want him either, not this God. That's why Peter betrayed Jesus in those last days. He couldn't take seeing the Christ, the savior, the long-awaited messiah—dying.

Jesus warned the disciples he would die, predicted Peter would deny him. Peter promised he'd never do it, never abandon Jesus, but he made that promise because he thought Jesus had it wrong. After all, Jesus was God, and surely God would turn at the last minute, use his divine power and strike out at the empire. He had to!

When it became clear Jesus was not that kind of God, when the death machine came and took him away, Peter broke. He denied Jesus. Not once. Not twice. Three times.

And not just Peter. Nearly all of the male disciples ran from the cross. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea only showed up in secret to retrieve his body, bury him before anyone could see. They were afraid to be associated with Jesus. Afraid to admit he wasn't much of a God at all.

I don't blame Peter, Nicodemus or Joseph. Let's be honest: Church would be so much easier, Christianity would sell so much better, if we focused on community, liturgy, doing good deeds. Why center your faith on a God who dies a brutal, lonely death, and then rises still bearing marks of his suffering? Who wants this wounded God?

In Jesus, we do not get the God we want. But we do get the God we need. I know I need him.

I need this God because he proves that our bodies and bodily conditions matter. This God is flesh, bones, muscle and wounds. This God will not shy from my flesh or my pain or yours. Touch me and see, he says. Trust what your eyes and your bodies tell you.

So much of western culture says *don't* trust your body; change it. Women in their 20s are getting Botox. Young men are suffering anorexia. Jesus says to them and to us, This IS my body: wounded, broken, holy. These imperfect human bodies bear divine wisdom. Don't hurt them. Thank God for them.

I need this God because he hungers like we hunger. In these first weeks after Easter, in so many of the resurrection accounts, we see Jesus eating. Bread and wine. Broiled fish. Our embodied God likes a good meal.

He also hungers and longs for communion with us. In Christ, we meet the God who yearns for relationship with God's own creation. His whole life, death and now resurrection is this journey toward reconciliation and communion. As I witness God's hunger for us, I feel my own hunger for the holy. How did Augustine say it? "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Amen!

Finally, I need God's self-giving love. Our world doesn't do love like this. It's a world of Judases and Peters. A world where the crowds will shout and throw roses at your feet one day, and then whip around and crucify you the next.

I imagine the state of this world must break God's heart. We are God's beloved creation and have become alienated from ourselves, from our communities, from that which is holy, loving and divine. I imagine God desperate to extend toward us and be reconciled.

That's what God is doing, in Jesus. In his life, I see love, truth, compassion. I see healing, power, justice. In him, I see the fullness of God.

And when he is nailed to the cross and dies, Jesus—God!—takes the final step across the chasm. He steps close to everyone who has ever been betrayed, oppressed, or crucified.

He is there with indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand. With the Asian women killed in Atlanta massage parlors on March 16. With the countless women, children, and vulnerable people trafficked for sex. With refugees turned away from our shores this very hour.

In Christ, God steps into the deepest pit. Into your hell and mine. He reaches his arms wide on the cross, stretching to everyone and anyone and saying, "I am with you. Even here. Where no one else would go. I see your broken heart. Mine is broken, too. I hear your cries. I'm crying with you. I love you too much to leave. If they take your life, I'm still not going anywhere."

And even when he returns, he shows them his hands and feet to prove it wasn't a trick. He's not a ghost. That suffering. That solidarity. It was and will always be real.

Because of his fierce, unbounded, self-giving love, we can trust God. We can make our home with God. I can receive God's love and feel response well up in my own heart, love for God, love for others, love for creation. Not because I think God will magically fix everything for us. But because God will endure everything with us. And then hold us up. And then send us on. That's love.

My God, my broken and wondrous God, how we need you. Especially now.

We need you, God, in face of the terrors humans inflict on other humans. I need you to get me through the trial of Derek Chauvin, as the defense argues that the murder we all witnessed with our own eyes wasn't really murder at all. As if George Floyd were not a child of this earth, a child of God. As if his body, his flesh, his black life did not matter at all.

We need you God, because even as Derek Chauvin's trial marched on, Minneapolis-area police killed Daunte Wright—yet another unarmed black man. We need a God who knows extended trauma, centuries of trauma, who doesn't pretend we can wave a wand or read a book or even combine all our good intentions and make it all better. A God who doesn't diminish or lie or sugar coat, but just stays, eats fish, breaks bread, dwells in our midst, accepts our doubt and despair... and does not flinch.

Oh Jesus, thank you for claiming us as your people. Like the disciples before us, we would not have chosen you. We would have asked for glory and might, beauty and power. You came in all humility and simplicity, self-giving love and lasting scars. Hold us in your wounded hands. Teach us your risen, loving way.

Jesus, our God, we need you. Amen.

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