

**Corporal Works of Justice:  
The Transgressive Body of Christ**

- **Corporal Works of Mercy.** List (from Matthew 25) of bodily works of mercy for our neighbors critical to *entering* the Reign of God. (*Focus on individual acts & personal salvation without challenging Kingdoms of the World.*)
- **Corporal Works of Justice.** Biblical texts showing *Body of Christ bringing about* the Kingdom of God by transgressing unjust boundaries & body politics of Kingdoms of the World & teaching us to do the same. (*Performed on personal level but impacting structural level.*)
- Read Scripture not just as “the **Word** of God,” listening to Jesus’ sermons, sayings, & parables teach us to bring about Reign of God, but also as “the **Body** of Christ,” seeing how this Body is placed & interacts to upend & dismantle unjust structures & communities, birthing the reign of God.
- We find a **transgressive Body of Christ** teaching us to **work for the Reign of God**. First, we see how this body is placed to transgress boundaries & upend hierarchies. Second, we see how Jesus teaches (& learns) to resist injustice with a transgressive body politics.

**Why We Need the Transgressive Body Politics of Christ Today.**

- Rising Levels of Alienation, Polarization, Mistrust, Hostility, & Brutality produce plummeting Rates of **Trust, Compassion, & Empathy**, Making Us Strangers & Enemies.
  - **Meritocracy** created 2 separate & unequal societies, increasing the gap between the rich & the rest & fueling antipathy between elites & shrinking middle class.
  - **Polarized politics** segregated left & right into hostile tribes unable to govern or converse.
  - **Populist nativism** turned against elites, scapegoated minorities, & rejected institutional politics, media, science, & education, crippling cooperation & conversation.
  - **Current government** makes enemies of courts, press, science, education, & government, scapegoating immigrants & sexual minorities while abandoning the needy.
  - **Majority of US Christians** support scapegoating & demonization of immigrants, minorities & dissidents as consistent with the Bible.
  - Holding up the **transgressive character of the Body of Christ**, which ignores & violates the world’s kingdoms hierarchical & unjust boundaries by taking up the flesh of outcasts, strangers, & enemies & teaching a body politics resisting injustice.

**Paul on the Transgressive Nature of the Body of Christ**

**Divine Being to Slave & Executed Criminal: (Philippians 2:7)** Christ, “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, ... (and became) obedient to death, even death on a cross.*”

**Innocent Person to Transgression: (2 Corinthians 5:21)** God made Christ “*who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” Through a life immersed in cursed places (from womb to tomb) the redemptive Body of Christ becomes a Mustard Seed or Leaven offering a path to transform the kingdoms of the world.

**Overcoming ALL Boundaries: (Galatians 3:28)** “*In (the Body of) Christ, there is no difference between Jew & Greek, slave, & free person, male & female. You are all the same in (the Body of) Christ Jesus.*” The Body of Christ transgresses borders of race, class & gender (joining the bodies identified as transgressors) segregating humanity into tribes. The body of Christ is *transgressive*.

**The Transgressive Body of Christ in Two Parts.**

**A. The Transgressive Body of Christ in Conception, Birth, Childhood, Arrest, Torture, Execution & Burial: Placing the Body of Christ Among Outcasts.**

1. **Placed in the Womb of a Single Unwed Mother.** His conception was a crime. Our savior was an illegal. (Matthew 1:18-25) Joseph to quietly divorce his betrothed because Deuteronomy 22:21 condemns her to stoning for pregnancy out of wedlock.
  - Jesus is conceived outside the law & as threat to his mother. (He joins nearly ½ of US babies born to unmarried women & is linked to countless women violating sexual norms.)
2. **Born in a Census City Among the COUNTED (Owned/Occupied).** (Luke 2:1-3) Jesus born where his parents must register as (tax) subjects of Rome, born as a *countable*/taxable subject of empire, marked as part of a conquered people.
  - Jesus among the counted, occupied & taxed. The counted who do not count. (African Americans & Indigenous “counted” as 2/3<sup>ds</sup> persons so white southerners would count more.)

3. **Born in the Manger of an Animal Shelter** (Luke 2:6-7) The baby is wrapped in cloths & laid in an *animal feeding trough* because there is no room for him in any human shelter.

○ Jesus is born “homeless” in a “*livestock shelter*,” making him one with the homeless & animal livestock. (Some irony in his birth at the table of livestock animals.)

4. **Born in a Town of Slaughtered Children** (Matthew 2:16-18) Herod has all the boys under two in & around Bethlehem slaughtered. Jesus is the target of this genocidal rage.

○ Solidarity with slaughtered children everywhere, especially the victims of war, & gun violence. (More than 473 million [over 1/6<sup>th</sup>] children lived in conflict zones in 2024, while 15% of US children’s death from firearms.)

5. **Born Among Refugees & Resident Aliens** (Matthew 2: 13-15) The babe, being stalked by a violent warlord, is taken out of the country by night, fleeing as a refugee to live in exile for years.

○ In solidarity with the 47 million forcibly displaced children around the world.

6. **Returns as an Internal Exile/Refugee in Fear of Local King.** (Matthew 2:21-23) Joseph takes the family back to Palestine when Herod dies, but not to Bethlehem, because of the danger there from the local ruler. So, Jesus grows up in Nazareth, an internal exile in his own nation.

○ Jesus joins the ranks of internal exiles & refugees like African American migrants from the South & white farmers from the Midwest as well as global refugees from war, poverty, & climate. (About 30 million children forcibly internally displaced in 2023.)

### **The Public Years. Standing with Outsiders**

7. **Wrestling with Demons & Wild Beasts** in the Wilderness. (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-2) In Mt account Jesus is led into wilderness to wrestle *alone & without food/support* with his deepest temptations. It is an inner contest with his demons. This is a place of isolation & deprivation where Jesus must wrestle alone with his temptations, devils & demons.

○ In solidarity with those wrestling alone with their deepest demons or temptations, including the emotionally troubled, addicted, & mentally ill everywhere? Jesus joins the ranks of the 22 million US adults (over 1 in 5) struggling with mental illness & the 14 million (1 in 20) struggling with serious mental illness.

8. **The Agony in the Garden** (Mount of Olives) (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46)

○ Like the desert, this shows solidarity with mental & emotional suffering & link between this solidarity through consciousness & willingness to act for justice. (Linking MLK’s people who think with those who act.) Here Jesus (in anguish) wants to avoid the suffering before him, but accedes to the cross coming to him. He also challenges the disciples, begging them to “stay awake” & face this suffering for an hour. But they cannot.

9. **Handed over for False Arrest.** (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-14) Here too Jesus uncovers & names the injustice of this arrest but will not engage in reactive violence to the mob, correcting Peter’s use of the sword, commanding him to put his sword back in its scabbard.

○ Links him with 2 million imprisoned Americans, 6 million Americans in jail, prison, or on parole, & over 70 million Americans (over 1 in 5) with felony records & with the imprisoned & silenced in all sorts of regimes. & connects him with those in prison for resisting injustice.

10. **Being Unjustly Accused & Arrested.** (Matthew 26:57-68 & 27:11-26; Mark 14:53-65 & 15:1-15; Luke 22:66-71 & 23:1-25; John 18:19-24 & 18:28-19:16) Explore how Jesus’ body is moved from unjust human court to court & how he holds his body & addresses his accusers.

○ Links him with 4 million Americans currently in US prison system & the millions in their families & communities injured by this prison system.

11. Being **Mocked & Tortured.** (John 19:1-3; Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 22:63-65)

○ Links him with the countless millions tortured in prisons in the US & around the world, including Guantanamo Bay.

12. Being **Executed Among Criminals.** (John 19:16-30; Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:26-49)

○ Linked with those executed & with those killed through “extrajudicial” execution or killing by the police.

13. Being Laid in a **Borrowed Tomb.** (John 19:38-42; Matthew 27: 57-61; Mark 15: 42-47; Luke 23:50-56).

○ Links Jesus with the “disappeared” & those in common, unmarked, or pauper graves.

### **Next Week: Teaching Transgressive Body Politics.**

After seeing how the Body of Christ is placed in ways that transgress & upend the unjust borders of the kingdoms of the world, we see how Jesus teaches & learns the transgressive body politics of God’s reign.