

## Podcast Transcript

7.23.23 Pentecost 8A

- [Genesis 28:10-19a](#) and [Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24](#) •
- [Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19](#) or [Isaiah 44:6-8](#) and [Psalm 86:11-17](#) •
- [Romans 8:12-25](#) •
- [Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43](#)

<<Music: “Building Up a New World,” 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.>>

<<“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”>>

### Intro:

- Beloveds, welcome back to The Word Is Resistance, the podcast where we’re exploring what our Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression - the times in which we are living today. What do our sacred stories have to teach us, as white folks, about our role in resistance, in showing up, in liberation?
- What wisdom is there for us as white Christians in these troubled, violent times of pandemics, rising authoritarianism, and racial capitalism? What beauty can we find in our resistance?
- I’m Rev. Anne Dunlap, pronouns she/her/hers. I’m a United Church of Christ minister and I’m the Faith Organizing Coordinator for Showing Up Racial for Justice (SURJ). I live in the place currently called\* Buffalo, NY, here in the homelands of the Haudenosaunee peoples.
- This podcast is a project of SURJ-Faith and is particularly designed for white Christians – white Christians turning towards other white Christians to talk about race and white supremacy. We believe white Christians like us, like me, have a responsibility to commit ourselves to *resisting* white supremacy, and also we believe we have a responsibility to tell a new story about Christianity for white christian folks. Because our lives, all our lives, depend on it.
- *And we do this work remembering* “We are building up a new world.” This live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding’s song for the freedom movement is of a multi-racial “movement choir practice” in Denver, CO in December 2014, being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.
- The Word is Resistance.

Well, I don’t know about y’all but

I’ve been so amazed by the episodes in this series,

#WrestlingWithRomans!

I think that giving our crew permission

To dig into a different way of reading Romans,

A different way of understanding Paul,  
Has really resulted in some incredible work here.  
If you're new to the series, I highly recommend  
You go back to the beginning and catch up!  
The beginning would be the June 11 episode,  
"Participants in the Promise,"  
Which also happened to be from me  
But I promise I'm not just promoting myself here.  
I've been mightily impressed  
by what our whole crew is doing here  
And I hope you are too!

Each week we are wading deeper into Paul's arguments  
About God's sovereignty against the Roman Empire's perceived sovereignty,  
And Paul – who is still and ever Jewish – calling to task the Roman members  
Of the Christ-following assembly in Rome who,  
As Neil Elliott says, "have begun to adopt the ideological perspective of the Roman Empire,"  
Which is imposing Rome's hierarchy of peoples on the gathering,  
With Romans at the top and Jewish folks and particularly *Judean* Jewish folks at the bottom,  
And taking on the values that perpetuate  
The "accumulation of power and prestige"  
That drives the exploitation and violence of the Roman Empire.

Even with that orientation front and center,  
It can *still* be hard to "hear" a different reading of Romans  
When we just...read the text.  
So I want to name that, so when I read this week's lectionary reading,  
You're not wondering why it doesn't sound like  
What I just said really at all.  
That was definitely my experience when I read it.  
So many layers of interpretative history  
Laid on top of this letter –  
So many layers of interpretive history  
Embedded in our very bodies –  
it's a lot to sort through!

At any rate, here's this week's reading,  
With just a touch of additions to the NRSV  
For clarity and for expansive understandings of gender:

**Romans 8:12-25**

8:12 So then, [siblings], we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh --

8:13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

8:14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

8:15 For you [Gentiles] did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we [Jews and Greeks] cry, "Abba! Parent!"

8:16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we [Jews and Greeks] are children of God,

8:17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

8:18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;

8:20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

8:21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;

8:23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait [for] the redemption of our bodies.

8:24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>

<<"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>

What if I told you your body is beautiful.  
What if I told you your body is beautiful.  
What if I told you your body is beautiful,  
Just the way it is,  
Curvy, soft, bendy, sore,  
Limited, aching, anxious,  
Joyful, trans, strong,  
Black, brown, pinkish,  
Queer, straight, muscle-y, small,  
Stretchy, dizzy, still,  
Menopausal, fat, bony,  
Tired, puzzling, sick,  
Freckled, hairy,  
Groaning, pleasurable,  
Beautiful  
Beautiful  
Beautiful  
Just the way it is.  
Just the way you are.

What if I told you *God* thinks your body is beautiful.  
What if I told you that God  
Actually cares about our bodies,  
Cares about what makes us hurt  
Cares about what brings us pleasure  
What if I told you that God  
Wants our bodies to be well-tended to,  
To be nourished and protected  
And loved and sheltered  
Right here.  
Right now.

What if I told you that it pisses God off  
That oppression harms our bodies,  
That empires rely on the exploitation of our bodies  
Human bodies, creature bodies, creation's bodies –  
That it pisses God off  
That empires build their power and wealth  
Off the suffering of our very bodies.

The exhaustion of our bones.  
The degradation of our nervous systems.  
The blood and sweat of our skin.

What if I told you that God  
Wants our bodies to be free from that suffering  
Right here, right now.  
That when Paul writes about the redemption of our bodies,  
That's what he means.  
He means that our bodies will be saved  
From the exploitation and repression the Roman Empire relies on  
To build and maintain its wealth and power –  
And that our bodies will be saved soon.  
So soon.  
That the endurance and patience and waiting  
Are only because Paul thinks  
Jesus is coming again to inaugurate this new reality,  
Like, tomorrow. Or at least in his own lifetime,  
Which is to say he expects to experience  
This new reality *in his own, living body*  
It's not an endurance and patience and waiting  
Until we die and get to heaven.  
It's so close Paul can taste it.  
This corrupt regime *\*cannot\** continue,  
God *\*has\** to be in charge of all of it,  
Gentiles and Jews coming together in unity,  
In solidarity, in community as  
Is part of what makes that reality possible,  
Oh taste and see.

What if I told you that  
The suffering that we experience is fact the condemnation  
Of this corrupt imperial order.,  
That the groaning we feel,  
that we cry out in multiple languages of multiple nations,  
Is information from our bodies,  
is *both* the testimony that this unjust order cannot continue,  
*And* the proof that something else is possible,  
Something else, something better, is about to be born.

That groaning is the work of our bodies.  
Not the bodies of death living according to the ways of Rome,  
But the bodies in tune with the Spirit of God  
And what God actually yearns and longs for for us.  
Freedom. Redemption. Glory.  
Family, which is to say community,  
Which is to say that division which exists to perpetuate dominating power  
Is abolished.

That groaning from our very bodies,  
From creation's very body –  
Because creation is subjected to that exploitation too –  
That groaning, Paul says, is the evidence of the Spirit at work,  
Which is to say that our groaning is Spirit,  
Our groaning is holy, is sacred,  
Which is to say this *embodied* outcry  
Against our suffering is holy, is sacred,  
Which is to say that our bodies,  
Our bodies that are wise enough to groan  
Against our suffering under exploitative conditions,  
Are holy. Are sacred.

What if I told you our bodies are beautiful.  
What if I told you our bodies are holy. Are sacred.  
Are wise. Are blessed.  
That God loves them.

And, the wildest of all possible things,  
Paul loves them too.

<< *Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World."* >>  
<< *"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long."* >>

I did not grow up hearing  
That Paul loved my body,  
And I bet you didn't either.  
We're taught that Paul teaches us  
That our bodies are at best just shameful things to be endured,  
That they get us into trouble,

That our bodies are sinful, that desire is sinful,  
That to not have a cisgender body is sinful,  
That to EAT and ENJOY and have PLEASURE in our bodies  
Is “to live according to the flesh.”  
That the “redemption of our bodies”  
Means...like, what does that even mean  
If our bodies are sinful,  
Other than some kind of utterly *disembodied*,  
Tasteless, smell-less, joy-less existence?

Nowhere in our sacred stories does God say  
That is what they want for us.  
God wants good rich food for us,  
Shelter for us,  
Cool drinks of water for us,  
Music and singing and dancing for us,  
The best wine for us,  
Rest for us,  
Love and warmth and companionship for us.  
For our bodies. For creation's body.

Our bodies is where Spirit lives.  
That is literally what Paul says here.  
Our bodies is where Spirit lives.  
And not like, in a little container somewhere sealed off  
*From* what our bodies actually do –  
But that Spirit lives in our embodiment,  
*In* what our bodies actually do,  
In our bones, our bellies, our limbs, our brains,  
Our breath, our tears, our pain, our throats –

We cry out names for God in multiple languages  
With voices generated *from our bodies*,  
And Paul says that is Spirit,  
The suffering, the literal pain *in our bodies* caused by exploitation  
is evidence of a different reality that is possible that is Glorious,  
Our groaning is the wisdom *of our bodies*  
Vocalizing in sound what kind of world we are longing for,  
Do we hear how important bodies are?  
Do we hear how our bodies are sacred sites

For the activity of Spirit?  
Do we hear how the act of our bodies crying out  
In our suffering in these conditions of exploitation  
Is seen and heard and acted upon by God  
Because *God cares about our bodies*?

Our bodies aren't saved because our bodies are bad.  
No. Our bodies are saved, redeemed,  
Because our bodies are precious to God  
But to the empire our bodies are sites, targets,  
Of exploitation and violence,  
Like lambs to imperial slaughter,  
And that, that suffering, is what we're being saved from.

Who does it benefit  
To claim that Paul teaches us to hate our bodies?  
That our bodies don't matter?  
That all that matters is to intellectually assent to some doctrines  
And wait for heaven,  
No matter what is happening to our bodies,  
Right here, right now?  
Who does it benefit  
To separate us from our own tender, fleshy bodies  
That tell us there is something better than "this present time?"

Empires that rely on exploitation and violence to accumulate power and wealth  
Benefit from us thinking our bodies don't matter.  
If we're taught we're just meant to suffer,  
That our bodies are just...means to an imperial, capitalist end,  
And even worse, that our bodies are sinful, shameful,  
it makes our bodies so much easier to exploit.  
We're not meant to feel joy or pleasure, or to even want those things.

It's an imperial reading of Paul that claims  
That Paul hates bodies.  
If anything *Paul hates what empires do to do bodies*.  
The way that empires, as Rev. Liz said a couple of weeks ago,  
Saturate our bodies with imperial ways of being  
So that even when we don't want to, we're embodying empire.  
Or as Brigitta said last week, the way empires use mind trickery that



Convinces us to wear imperial flesh to re-enact  
The domination and division that make empires run.

And, Paul hates the suffering that  
exploitation and other forms of imperial violence cause.  
Paul says so many times in Romans that  
What Rome does to our bodies is wrong!  
We don't suffer because our bodies are bad.  
We suffer because our bodies are meant for  
goodness and joy and pleasure and rest  
And we literally *cry out* from our own bodies  
When we are not allowed those things,  
And that outcry is Spirit  
Because *God loves our bodies*.

God loves our bodies.  
And getting free includes our bodies,  
And all throughout Romans Paul makes clear  
That how we get free, how we embody  
That alternative reality that is coming,  
that is *both* so close we can hear the labor pains,  
And *also* is right here right now –  
How we “obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God”  
Is in how we care for one another's bodies  
Is in how we love one another's bodies.

Hear Feel Taste See Smell  
The good news:  
Your body is beautiful.  
God loves your body.  
Our bodies are beautiful.  
God loves our bodies.

Our bodies are so, so good.  
However they may be.

Amen.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of “Building Up a New World.”>>  
<<“Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.”>>

*[Call to Action and outro]*

Your call to action this week is...to love on your body. Whatever that means to you! I myself am having a massage later today! Maybe it's relishing good food, or snuggling up with a beloved or a sweet pet, maybe it's good sex, maybe it's just closing your eyes and giving yourself 10 minutes of rest, maybe it's paying attention to the groaning in you that is information about what is not right about "this present time." Maybe pick up adrienne maree brown's book "Pleasure Activism" and find some new practices for loving your body and our collective of bodies. Your body is beautiful ~ find a way to enjoy that good news!

Beloveds, thanks as always for joining us from wherever you are on this good earth. We'd love to hear from you all, especially from folks of color and non-Christian folks, by filling out the listener survey on our podcast page at surj dot org. And give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you listen to our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at surj dot org, and our podcast lives on Soundcloud; search on "The Word Is Resistance." Transcripts are available as well on our website, which include references, resources, and action links. We'll be back next week with a resistance Word from Sharon Fennema, as we continue on in our #WrestlingWithRomans series.

And of course, a huge thanks to our sound editor this week, Claire Hitchins!

(Words of blessing/encouragement)

- Blessings to you in all that you do to resist injustice, and in all that you do to build up a new world.
- Love and liberation, beloveds. Love and liberation.
- Until next time. I'm Rev. Anne Dunlap.

<<Verse 3 of "Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated.>>  
<<"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"  
*We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.>>*

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RESOURCES:

"The Word is Resistance" Episode 7: [Romans and the Wages of Whiteness \(transcript here\)](#)

Neil Elliott, [The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire](#)

Personal notes from Fall 2006 class on Romans with Dr. Pamel Eisenbaum, Iliff School of Theology.

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#### REFERENCES:

*\*The Jewish Annotated New Testament, NRSV.* 2nd Ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. Oxford University Press, 2017. Check all the amazing essays in the back!

*\*Why do I say “currently called” Buffalo, NY? Indigenous scholar Damien Lee: “When I write, I avoid the phrase ‘...in what is now Canada.’ I use ‘...in what is currently Canada’ to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state.” [Check out this post for more.](#)*

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