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B O D Y
L A N G U A G E

LISTENER
GUIDE

STARLETTE THOMAS

TRACKLIST

AN ARM AND A LEG
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TONGUE

STARLETTE THOMAS

GOOD FAITH MEDIA





HELLO!

Don't mind his face. He's happy to see that you have joined me and my guests for season three of The Raceless Gospel podcast, which looks at the North American church's body language.

Saying one thing and doing another, the challenge remains embodiment. The cover (pictured left) depicts a white-washed Jesus up in arms and in his feelings.

What is he going to do with his body of believers? Because, well, look at their body language!

Folded arms, eyes rolling, we don't have to say a word to convey what we mean. Our body will speak for us. No poker face, our body is not a good place to hide our feelings. No matter the agreements made, the allegiances asserted or how we try to dress it up, our body does not get the message. It will betray us.

But how has it betrayed our confession of faith?

From what's costing it an arm and a leg to the undivided "kin- dom" to come that is right on the tip of our tongues, each episode examines how we have mishandled and marginalized some of our members. Employing Paul's letter to the church at Corinth (12:12-27) as a prescriptive lens, each episode addresses a member's issue while highlighting the need to accept all limbs.

We've got more bodywork to do and more than a few screws missing. Nobody's perfect so let's keep on talking and tinkering.

All members of the body of Christ, called to bear witness to a world that is listening but also watching our body language.



The Thread

that holds this body of work together is First Corinthians 12:12-27. Each of the eight episodes is tied to a scripture that reminds us that we are one in Christ Jesus and called to embodiment.

Episode 1. AN ARM AND A LEG

¹² 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.

Episode 2. THE COLD SHOULDER

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

Episode 3. KEEP AT ARM'S LENGTH

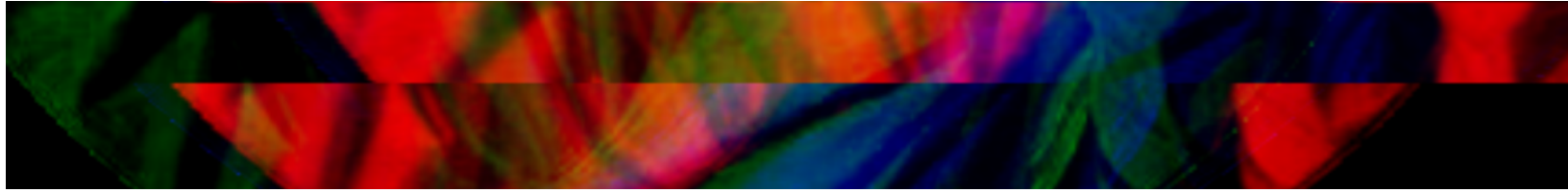
¹⁵ If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Episode 4. FOOT IN MOUTH

¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

Episode 5. TURN A BLIND EYE

²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable



members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this.

Episode 6. SITTING ON YOUR HANDS

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

Episode 7. TOE THE LINE

²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Episode 8. ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.



Call & Response

If you have been baptized, then you are in and there's no way out. In too deep, we are buried with Christ and there's no way out. There's no backing out of this funeral procession.

Fall in line. Pick up your cross and prepare to die. This is the only way, and we are in this together as a *body* of believers.

Out with the old and in with the new life in Christ. This is not simply about raising our standards but our sights, our vision. We cannot see it now, but we will be revealed in Christ. Jesus is taking his believers to new heights. Resurrected, we have been given a new lease on life and we need to act like it.

But what is the body of Christ saying?

William Willimon writes in *Why Jesus?*:

“There are some people who think of Jesus as ‘spiritual.’ Jesus is that vaguely divine something that enables you to pump yourself full of helium and rise above the grubbiness of life in this carnal world. Wrong. The Christian faith, taking its cues from Jesus, is insistently material, corporeal, anthropomorphic, muscular, and incarnational. ‘The Word made flesh.’ God’s Word has become a person, a person in motion. Jesus is God Almighty daring to get physical; God with a body, a body in motion.”

So, it's your move.

This third season of The Raceless Gospel podcast invites listeners to look at the messages our bodies are sending as baptized believers. With this listener guide, the work is just that— to listen.

Read each prayer and listen to your body's language. What is it calling you to say with your own?



Episode 1. An arm and a leg.

God in the flesh,
in skin and bones,
in arms outstretched on a cross because you became enmeshed in
human affairs— what a tangled crown of thorns we weave.

Forgive us for asking for your help and then withdrawing support, for
denying our need for you,
for calling you the problem,
for scapegoating,
for blame- shifting,
for enriching ourselves from your suffering,
for dismissing the cost of our betrayal,
for turning a blind eye to injustice and making your good news
unrecognizable to the impoverished and marginalized,
for going along so that we could get on with our lives.

There is not much difference between us and those first disciples, not
too much distance between us and them— though capitalism thrives
on our divisions.

We confess that we are distant,
disconnected,
detached from experiencing,
from knowing the feeling of all our members.

Instead, we feign that we have it together,
that we are all in this body together on classist, gendered, hyper-
politicized and segregated Sunday mornings as if you are not God in
the flesh,
as if this is not your body— and you cannot tell the difference.

Remind us that the cost of discipleship is not an arm and a leg.

Amen.



Episode 2. The cold shoulder.

God, who rubs shoulders with us,
who travels in the same circles,
who mingles with the marginalized and decenters the powerful through
prophets, priests, sweet baby Jesus and everyday people,
we bow our heads with hearts grieved for those who have been given the
cold shoulder by the North American church.

We acknowledge those who have been snubbed, slighted, spurned,
shunned, and steered clear of.

We confess that we freeze them out for one pseudo- biblical, financial,
hyper- political, racial, traditional reason or another.

We reject them faithfully and as an expression of faith,
as a practice of discipleship,
as a tool of evangelism,
as a demonstration of supremacy,
as a means of control,
as a display of power,
as something to be proud of.

We confess that we have been wrong and way too loud.

Teach us how to tone it down, to dial it back and to have their backs
now.

Forgive us for our chilly responses and hold us accountable for blame-
shifting,
for our spiritual bypassing,
for telling them to be stronger and to not be so sensitive,
to get used to it,
to get used to being knocked down,
to dust themselves off and try to be welcomed again by the church while
shouldering a burden that shouldn't have been placed on them in the first
place when they are already carrying a world a hurt.

Amen.



Episode 3. **Keep at arm's length.**

God, up close and personal,
who calls face- to- face meetings,
who, in Jesus, shares the face of Mary, shares space and time with us,
who is not up, up, and away from us, "up above our heads somewhere,"
not kept away from us because we are not enough,
because we did not live up to who or what You had in mind when You
created us,
teach us how to love.

Because You are love through and through,
from beginning to end though we try to put You in the middle of our
skirmishes.

We don't have to fight for Your love. Teach us how to share it. How to pass
it down and around and around again until it comes back to us. Remind
us that it comes down to us loving ourselves.

Because there is no distance between us and You and no way that we
could be kept from You.

Some persons will say what they want to, what they feel they have to, but
You love us all anyway.

No restrictions, no preconditions because no matter who we are, we are
all God's children, all siblings, all related, all next of kin.

Call us back to each other and closer to You, whose arms are wide open,
saying, "Come and get this love."

Amen.



Episode 4. **Foot in mouth.**

God, who has a word for it,
who puts the Divine finger on it,
who has a hand and a foot in it,
who speaks through a burning bush and a ram caught in the thicket,
who makes it plain and the way clear through prophet and priest who
said the same thing again and again,
who walked it out in Jesus,
who rinses us in baptism and commissions us to repeat it:

we repent for washing our hands of the work we need to come together
as a body that believes all members are created equally,
for color- coding the body of Jesus,
for racializing his gospel,
for segregating his church,
for providing theological cover for oppression and for blessing the
dehumanizing efforts of capitalism.

We repent for recreating some of us as supreme and defacing others to
put them in the numerical minority— as if we don't all count,
as if we all don't count for something and as someone,
as a person,
a fellow human being,
as if we are not all made in the Imago Dei,
in the spitting image of our Creator.

We confess that we know the truth but pretend to be ignorant of the
words for equality, for justice, for peace.

We confess that we simply refuse to say them,
to deconstruct race and to denounce white supremacy.

We ask You to perform a miracle, to take our foot out of our mouth and
inspire us to not only say, "Humility, justice, and reparations" but to act it
out.

Because how else can we claim to walk with Jesus?

You have a word for those who pretend to.

While we are thinking of it, throw some holy water on us because we have been stuck like this for a long time and we are ready say something different so we can go in a different direction.

Amen.



Episode 5. Turn a blind eye.

God, who is all eyes, we pray for those who are turned away,
whose experiences are denied,
who are then re- traumatized,
who did speak up the first time.

But then the person they confide in turns a blind eye and so it happens
again and again.

You know why this keeps happening?

It is not because your eyesight is failing. Instead, our own systems of justice
are. We care more about the checks that balance our budgets.

You know why this keeps happening?

She shouldn't have to say it again. We heard her but can't look her in the
eyes. Because we would have to recognize something hard to see
otherwise about ourselves.

God, who do you call when the cries for help are coming from inside the
church,
inside the house of prayer,
inside our childhood home,
inside the school,
inside the gym,
inside the car parked on a side street.

This is a dark and lonely road.

Go with those who we refuse to see because of bad touches,
inappropriate advances that cut chances of victims feeling safe even
when placed in good hands.

Keep an eye on them as I leave them now in your hands.

Amen.



Episode 6. **Sitting on your hands.**

God, who takes care of babies and fools,
who looks out for people who defy wisdom and drool,
teach us how to view those we reduce to so-called wild people on the
loose.

Make our hearts tender to their needs and may we grieve for minds not as
ease due to chemical imbalance and trauma.

We confess, they're not "off their rocker" as they rock back and forth on
pews, in alleys and padded rooms.

Instead, they have been shaken to the core and they can't shake it. They
can't just "move on" or "get over it." So, they pull the covers over their
head, and they refuse to get out of bed. They don't want to talk to
anybody, and they sometimes don't take their meds.

Yes, it's good for them. Yes, we know what's best for them and God,
we're only trying to help them— until they refuse it. Or, we sit on our hands
and hope they have better luck next time, that they'll just get better with
time.

Forgive us for pushing them to the back of our minds and to the margins
of society. Because we don't understand them or why this is happening.

Because we can't fix them or make this problem go away. So, we put
them away. Out of sight, out of mind.

We are commanded to love you with all our heart, soul, and mind
(Matthew 22:37).

May we love them and their minds enough to take care of them and to
look out for them too.

Amen.



Episode 7. **Toe the line.**

God, undivided, who comes in a group of three, a pack of the Trinity, I am so grateful that you are expressed as a Divine Community.

This holy three keeps me company.

Not split down the middle, on the right or the left side, you are many and I accept you fully.

God, I want to be found on the Lord's side, not breaking my stride but stepping up to do the work and to bear witness to the "kin-dom" that is coming and to the one who does not paint us into a corner.

Help us to accept full responsibility for not living into the fullness of your image, instead dividing and splintering, and divvying it up, carving it up, coloring it in and then drawing a line around it.

This "color line," we dare not cross it and especially not on Sunday morning. No, God, at 11 a.m. sharp, it's a hard line. But it's well past time that we erase it.

Give us the courage to face it, that is the heresy of a racialized body of Christ and to face the fact that you don't come in our favorite color.

Show us that your love is not a fine line, a thin line between colors.

Point us to a place not far from here but that is far different from here. Remind us that we know the way, that it started the day we were baptized, and that we didn't just put our toe in.

Amen.



Episode 8. On the tip of my tongue.

Wordy God, whose tongue is never tied,
who is never at a loss for words,
who is always hovering and creating something new,
calling out the unseen within our midst.

Yes, you have a word for every person, place, and thing.

We confess that your tongue does not tie us down, wrap us up or wrap around us in ways that limit autonomy and mobility. In fact, you created us to live authentically, fully, and freely.

Your words for each of us are not prejudicial, stereotypical, or limiting.

Your vocabulary for us is ever- expanding. You have more to say about us than race and its progeny.

May you get a word in edgewise.

God, empower us to speak freely. Give us the words outside of categories and the confines of dueling and false binaries.

What's the word for unity, for unconditional love, for unrestricted community, for the fullest expression of our human being?

Give us the ears to hear what you are saying and say it again.

Repeat it until it rings in our ears, until our souls vibrate, until it causes a rippling effect in our society.

Turn this world and its racialized dichotomies upside down and let it be said that the movement started when we pushed words off the tip of our tongues.

Amen.

