



THE EPISCOPAL CENTER FOR EMBODIED FAITH
PRESENTS
Theological Reflections on Embodied Faith: Body Talk

Strong and Brave and Beautiful
The Rev. Amy Wiegert

My daughter helped out at church last week. She lit candles, helped with the offering, and served communion. My son couldn't wait to leave the pew and go see his sister up front as we walked forward for communion. He stood, forgetting to get his piece of bread, looking up at her. "Hi," he repeated, "Hi." When we wrangled him back down the aisle, he told me, "She looks so pretty." Did I mention he's three? My daughter is strikingly beautiful, I agree, as do others we know or meet.

That Sunday after church, a nice, older white lady who is often complementary said, "Your daughter's growing up. She'll have a nice figure. Better keep a tight rein on her!" I thought for a minute, holding my son's hand. "And the boys!" I called after her, "The boys need to be raised to be good men!"

I stood there, stunned, almost unbelieving the exchange that just took place. I'm used to having people try to legislate my body and I'm used to my body not doing what I'm asking it to do – try a new yoga stretch, use a new allergy medicine, or carry a baby to term. I've incorporated into my journey several awful dating relationships, one horrific. I don't like it, but I'm sort of used to all that. I'm not at all used to folks commenting, in public, on my daughter's body.

She and I have had long conversations, discussions, sometimes disagreements about bodies, what sort of clothes to wear, what age is appropriate for a low heel, lip gloss, and eye shadow. I'm learning a new skill set of what's appropriate and what's not, because my daughter is black and I am white. I'm thankful to friends and family who are teaching me how to mother her. I'm thankful to friends who tell me how long her hair should be for her age. I'm thankful that she has some other black faces to look into and be told she's beautiful and how they love the shape of her nose and her big brown eyes. (I say it all the time but, as she reminds me, "You're mom, so, technically, you have to say it...")

On the day of the Women's March, I picked my daughter up from West African dance class. I look through the glass side panel, each student taking her turn in the circle to show her dance moves. After all had taken a turn, the drummer stopped. The teacher stood, reminding them that they are strong, that they are brave, and that they are beautiful. "Yeah I guess you're right," says one girl. "Yes! Right!" shouts the teacher. Then she poses a question, "Do you know why women are marching today? For you. So you can do whatever you want to do. So you can try whatever you want to try.

Because you are strong and you are powerful. And you don't forget that. Don't let anyone else define you."

And there it is. That's what I'll say the next time someone tells me to keep a tight rein on my daughter. I'll say that she is strong and brave and beautiful. Yes, I will tell her that.

Prayer

O God our Maker, we give thanks for all that you have made. Turn toward us that we might live, really live. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, as you have told us. Give us your power, entrust us with your Spirit, so that each new day we may live as a new creation. Guide us to turn toward you, in all of our thoughts, in all of our movement, in all of our struggles. We live with you each day. Walk with us into new ways of living with each other. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How many times can you remember someone commenting on how you look?
- 2) How many times can you remember someone commenting on another aspect of self (talented, compassionate, smart, funny, kind?)
- 3) How do you talk with children in your community? Do you engage them based on appearances or on talents/abilities/interests?
- 4) Psalm 139 talks about God's complete knowledge and care for us. Read the psalm. What verses draw your attention? Why?

For Further Exploration:

- 1) But I Don't See You as Asian: Curating Conversations About Race. Bruce Reyes Chow, (2013). (Self-published)
- 2) A Tribe Apart: A Journey to the heart of American Adolescence. Patricia Hersch, New York: Ballantine Books, 1999.
- 3) Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School. Ed. Mica Pollock. New York: The New Press, 2008.
- 4) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2015/07/23/raising-free-spirited-black-children-in-a-world-set-on-punishing-them/?utm_term=.8929c27824a2
- 5) <http://grassrootscommunityfoundation.org/1000-black-girl-books-resource-guide/>

About the Author: Amy Wiegert is a Lutheran pastor who lives on Chicago's Southside with her husband and their two children. She leads retreats, writes, and preaches. She enjoys bluegrass music and the everyday question, "Mom, can we get a dog?"