

St Paul Center for Theology and Prayer: Finding A Way, #4, April , 2024

Our bodies, our Land. Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands

From chapter 1: Your Body and Blood

“History is not the past, it is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history.” *James Baldwin*

“There is deep wisdom within our very flesh, if we can only come to our senses and feel it.” *Elizabeth A. Behnke.*

“For the past three decades, we’ve earnestly tried to address white-body supremacy in America with reason, principles, and ideas—using dialogue, forums, discussions, education, and mental training. But the widespread destruction of black bodies continues. And some of the ugliest destruction originates with our police. Why is there such a chasm between our well-intentioned attempts to heal and the ever-growing number of dark-skinned bodies who are killed or injured, sometimes by police officers?

It’s not that we’ve been lazy or insincere. But we’ve focused our efforts in the wrong direction. We’ve tried to teach our brains to think better about race. But white-body supremacy does not live in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies....

Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains.

Trauma is ... a wordless story our body tells itself about what is safe and what is a threat.

Soul Wound

Our very bodies house the unhealed dissonance and trauma of our ancestors.

We need to metabolize this trauma; work through it with our bodies.”

From Chapter 9: Changing the World Begins with your Body

“As of this writing, many white progressives remain committed to interventions that ignore or dismiss the crucial role historical trauma plays in people’s lives.” [See Baldwin quote]

- **Physical Therapy for Soul Wounds.** Menakem’s work allows us to dare to imagine the spiritual work of the Landscape of Slavery Tours as part of a process of healing from collective trauma, a physical therapy for soul wounds. The physicality of it is important- important to move and offer our bodies in the listening, because our bodies hold the legacy. As with physical therapy, a mode of reliable healing work that builds transformation from recruitment of dormant muscle, and progresses by incremental small movements which accumulate to build capacity.
- **Training the senses to perceive embedded knowledge.** “Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains.” Like Nan Shepherd, Menakem is inviting us into work with our senses to find “deep wisdom” in our flesh. White bodies and black bodies are carrying trauma, built and reinscribed over centuries. To untangle, to heal, to transform can not happen without reckoning with those layers, which we call “history.”
- **Pause.** Silence and stillness necessary counterpoint to movement. Necessary for training to listen to “stories impossible to tell, and hard to hear.”