

Ableism - Quotes from “My Body is Not a Prayer Request”

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-Curing vs. Healing

“It is true that Jesus cured people’s bodies as part of his ministry, but this passage* is often misinterpreted to perpetuate the notion that disabled people require physical modification to be complete. Jesus’s ministry is not all about a physical cure but about holistic healing.

Today, we typically think of illness (and sometimes disability) as biological, with Western medicine set up to find and cure disease directly. When Westerners go to the doctor, it’s usually to find a cure for whatever symptoms we’re experiencing. I’m in pain: fix it, medicine. Folks in Jesus’s day thought about healing in much broader terms. They talked about healing as restoring relationships and integrating someone back into social and religious systems. The Greek word often used in Scripture for healing is *sozo*, which means “to make whole” or “to save.” It’s the same word used to talk about salvation. Jesus’s healing is not purely about a physical alteration but about reestablishing right relationship between humanity and God and, hopefully, between individuals and community. Healing allows people to flourish. Modern medicine still recognizes the difference between curing and healing. Curing is a physical process; it’s individual, usually (fairly) rapid, and concentrates on eliminating disease. Healing is a sociocultural process. It focuses on restoring interpersonal, social, and spiritual dimensions. It’s lengthy and ongoing because it’s a process of becoming whole.” P. 14

*the healing of the man born blind (who sinned, him or his parents? - no one! It is for the glory of God.)

-Vending machine vocabulary: of all the adjectives and phrases available to be used, some are passed their best-before date. (See list of words: http://web.augsburg.edu/english/writinglab/Avoiding_Ableist_Language.pdf)

“I am not your metaphor. My body is not your symbol to use. My crippled body and lame leg do not give you permission to dismiss me as symbolic for whatever you find difficult. Being told over and over again that your body is immoral is exhausting. No, that meeting was not “paralyzing” or “crippling” or “blinding,” unless it was physically paralyzing, crippling, or blinding.

Language is a repository for our biases. It carries centuries of shameful ideologies about disability. When we choose a word to convey an idea, it’s like facing a vending machine; we must select from what is already there. (If the vending machine had thousands of adjectives, that is.)” P. 59

-Using ableist words can be irritating to those who are actually disabled.

“Whenever I’m informed that I’m oversensitive for asking someone to stop using disability slurs or metaphors, I wonder what the barometer for sensitivity is. Is there an accepted rubric somewhere I don’t know about? Casting me as oversensitive assumes that microaggressions are overblown. Microaggressions are like mosquito bites. When you rarely get bitten, they aren’t a big deal. Sure, your skin is itchy and a little puffy, but after a day of intermittent scratching, you erase the incident from your memory with ease. Mosquito, who? Microaggressions are dismissed as minuscule, like mosquito bites, because they seem fleeting.

But when you are bitten dozens of times in a day, mosquito bites are less of a pest and more of a pestilence. Goose bumps spread across your body: persistent prickly tingles on your every hair follicle. You are no longer able to hear anything except the pulsing nettles nagging your raw skin. “Scratch me,” the bites beckon—louder, shriller, rowdier, until it’s all you can hear.” P. 61

“Each of these is a trifling bite, imperceptible to everyone around me, but eventually, I am covered in mosquito mounds from head to toe, ableism malaria pounding beneath my enflamed, raw skin.” P. 62

“The good news is the story doesn’t end there. Jesus defeated the dominions of darkness, so we don’t have to live in them. You can help shift the ongoing power of ableism by doing the internal work of changing your language. You can welcome us by making sure we are celebrated for who we are instead of shamed for what we cannot do. You can build more accessible spaces by learning when your vending machine choice accidentally poisoned us. You can make space for disabled people to lead inside the beloved community. You can become DEET.” P. 63

-Designing church buildings and worship spaces.

“We need to crip our church spaces and practices. In the disability community, we talk about the need to crip spaces to reclaim a derogatory word that was crafted to mock our bodily difference. It signals that we shouldn’t settle for “no ableism” or even for inclusion; we want to foster belonging. We don’t just want disabled people to be invited to the table, we want to be such a core part of the group that we are missed when we are not around. We want to be able to be our full selves, not reduced to the label of disability. To crip something is to invite the way disability disrupts our ideas of what is normal and allow disability to lead how we gather and participate in a communal space without hierarchy. Crip space is created by and for disabled people’s needs. It centers the needs of disabled people and cultivates the environment and its norms with us in mind. Instead of adding us in as an afterthought, crip space considers our needs from the outset. It makes the muffins with the blueberries in the batter instead of tossing them on top after the muffins are baked.” p. 80

“God promises to crip new creation by building it around disabled people. Zechariah’s depiction of Jerusalem’s marvelous future includes this image: “Men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there” (Zech. 8:4–5 NIV). Disability is represented as natural as children playing in the streets, almost like a sitcom family montage. The elderly women and men are portrayed positively with their canes, without any sense that physical alteration must occur for Jerusalem to be restored. Jeremiah’s vision for the restoration of Jerusalem shows God gathering disregarded people, including “the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor” to a restored city where God “will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble” (Jer. 31:8–9 NIV). The lame, the blind, those pregnant and in labor, the elderly, and children collectively offer a sign of hope for the restoration of the future. They remind the audience that they will not always be exiles and outcasts.” p. 81-82

“This is how I imagine crip space: with “the lame” as a remnant. Build with us. Build alongside us. Create space for us to thrive. Then the restoration of new creation will be accessible to all. We are the sourdough starter of new creation. Without us, creation will not rise.” p. 83

-Inventions that were created to accommodate a disabled person which have been incorporated by able-bodies:

“Have you ever ridden a bike? Used an iPhone? Texted a friend? Sent a care package? Peeled a potato? Then you’ve used assistive technology. When we hear the phrase “assistive technology,” most of us imagine electric wheelchairs, cochlear implants, and carbon fiber prosthetics, but the history of assistive technology features products that most nondisabled people use every day.

The wheelchair was a precursor to the bike. Stephan Farffler, a paraplegic watchmaker, designed a self-propelled wheelchair in 1655. His hand-controlled three-wheeler led to our modern bicycles and tricycles. His model resembles a recumbent tricycle like the ones you’ll find at any beach. The typewriter was invented for a blind woman, Countess Carolina Fantoni

da Fivizzano, to write to her lover, Pellegrino Turri, without the use of a scribe. Like WhatsApp, but for the 1800s. In 1874, Alexander Graham Bell worked on a phonograph to allow d/Deaf students to see vibrations of sound, leading to his work on the telephone. Ring, ring, it's disability justice calling.

Scanners at the post office come from RCA Laboratories' 1949 development of OCR (optical character recognition), which L. E. Flory and W. S. Pike initially designed to read text aloud to blind people. Now OCR is used in scanners, computers, and smartphones all over the world. If you've ever converted a PDF into a Word document, you've used OCR technology. Text messaging was originally designed for people who are d/Deaf. Now millennial culture is texting someone "sorry, can't talk right now" instead of picking up the phone when they call. Entire friendships and family group chats exist over this medium. Texting has become so ubiquitous that it's worrying (read: annoying) when someone calls you. "Is everything OK?" you awkwardly inquire, surprised at the sound of your own voice.

OXO potato peelers. Electronic toothbrushes. Weighted blankets. Twist jar openers. Fidget spinners. Pencil grips. The Snuggie. Audiobooks. Closed-captioning. Touch-screen interfaces. That's right, every time you touch that iPhone, you are using assistive technology. All of these devices were created for and with disabled people. They only became mainstream once folks realized the products could benefit everyone. Living with a disability encourages innovation, because our body-minds do not belong in the current world. Disability is a creative force that allows us to imagine a new world." p. 83-84

-Disability is often seen as a loss of something... but what if we acknowledged that there is a group of people that have a whole sub-culture that has benefits to bring to the rest of the church? ...we could learn from the view of blind people (no difference between dark and light) and see God with a whole different understanding.

"So many of us have been taught to understand disability from a loss model. We believe that disabled bodies have lost the ability to do something: to walk, to run, to speak, to ride a bike. I understand that to many nondisabled folks, I cannot walk "normally." That is true, but it's not the whole story. It negates the fact that I can *glide*. Wheelchairs are freedom, many of my fellow wheelchair users say. They allow us to move freely throughout the world. When I use my wheels, folks who are walking must keep up with me. I ride off into the sunset before they ever realize where I've skyrocketed. What if we recognized disability as a necessary disruption to the status quo? What if we understood disability not through potential loss, but through its multitude of gains? If we allowed more room for biodiversity, we might come to fully embrace disabled people as bringing their own cultural narrative and embodied wisdom to our communities. We might even embrace our disabled God." P. 90

-“Crip Time” is a way to explain non-linear time based on a disability... the spoon theory is also a way that has become a popular description (<https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/>). Linear time gets interrupted (often). Time is not defined by accomplishments, but by being lovingly present... God's time is “love”, not “clock”.

“Crip time. The idea that time does not progress in a linear way that would allow disabled people to experience a predictable future with planned outcomes. Disability disrupts normative notions of time found in clocks and calendars. It unsettles the assumed life span and activities attached to any given life stage. Past, present, and potential future are incoherent, jumbled like a drawer of power cords you can't disentangle. Even the concept of prognosis assumes a future time, a state when you are no longer ill, as if disability comes with an expiration date like a carton of milk.

Grief is the way that most of us familiarize ourselves with this fluidity of time. You're fine. Then one Tuesday at work, you catch the whiff of your grandma's soap, and you are transported to the day she died. You become a living monument to the memory of her, your grief a comfort in preserving the only scented fragment left of her.

Crip time functions in a similar way. I am a living prognosis. Instead of forcing my body to adhere to the clock, crip time "bends the clock to fit the demands of the disabled body and mind."⁷ I am a melting clock in a Salvador Dalí. Time explodes into a million shattered pieces of bodily experience, like glass shards crunching underfoot. There is no projected development for my body. The future itself is precarious. I exist in the liminal temporality of crip time.

But then again, so might God. Isaiah tells us that God "inhabits eternity" (Isa. 57:15). The psalmist writes, "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4). Peter echoes this idea: "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). God is omnipresent and everlasting, situated outside the linear confines of our clocks. The way God inhabits time, unfolded, cyclical, and nonlinear, can be understood through the experience of crip time and the disabled body." P. 93-94

-Ableism is focussed on productivity, professionalism and independence.

"I am resigned to live a life of foolishness. I smell like lidocaine patches. Cords dangle from my body. My "never tell me the odds" Millennium Falcon slippers have paced the halls of my workplace, as they are often the only footwear I can manage. I have had to let go of concepts like "professionalism," "productivity," and "independence." My husband often helps me put my clothes *on*, which is a fun reversal that purity culture didn't warn me about." P. 97

-At his table, David includes Mephibosheth because of *who* he is and his disability does not exclude him.

"Jesus's description of the great banquet features poor and disabled people, much like the banquet Jesus's ancestor, David, hosts with Mephibosheth. At the height of his prestige, David seeks to bestow compassion on a remnant of Saul and Jonathan's family. The only problem? The lone remaining descendant is Mephibosheth, who is lame in both feet and a poor outcast as a result, because disabled people were not permitted to enter the palace (2 Sam. 5:8). Instead of dismissing him, David invites Mephibosheth to his table, which becomes a model for the kingdom of God in the prophetic imagination. David quells Mephibosheth's qualms over being summoned, reassuring him, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always" (2 Sam. 9:7). Always. Just as at Jesus's banquet, Mephibosheth is invited *always*.

Mephibosheth is not cured. He is simply welcomed, just as he is, to sit alongside the king and share a meal, "like one of the king's sons" (9:11). This is what the kingdom of God tastes like. It is not a tiny table with an exclusive guest list, accessible only to nondisabled elites, but an expansive one, where disabled and nondisabled people feast together, side by side, without animosity. It models what Ada María Isasi-Díaz calls a kin-dom, a space of mutuality and interdependence. This banquet is accessible." P. 102-103