

## **The Church and the Wounded Body: Disability Hermeneutics of the Apparition Narrative of Jesus in the Gospel of John 20:19:23**

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### **Abstract**

Interpretations of biblical texts often ignore the perspectives of marginalized groups, including individuals with disabilities. This research departs from concerns about the lack of readings of biblical texts that consider the experience of disability, especially in the context of church communities that still often exclude individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This research uses the biblical hermeneutic method, with a disability hermeneutic approach as an interpretative framework. The results of the reading show three main findings: first, the experience of disability is validated in the presence of God through the wounded body of Jesus; second, God is portrayed as compassionate and present in human suffering; third, the Holy Spirit initiates fellowship that upholds equality and justice. The findings show that the narrative of John 20:19-23 contains strong values of inclusivity, and can be a theological basis for the church to embrace IDD equally.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics; Jesus; Disability; Church and Body

### **Abstrak**

Penafsiran terhadap teks-teks Alkitab sering kali mengabaikan perspektif kelompok marginal, termasuk individu dengan disabilitas. Penelitian ini berangkat dari keprihatinan terhadap minimnya pembacaan teks Alkitab yang mempertimbangkan pengalaman disabilitas, khususnya dalam konteks komunitas gereja yang masih kerap melakukan eksklusi terhadap individu dengan disabilitas intelektual dan perkembangan (IDD). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode hermeneutika Alkitab, dengan pendekatan hermeneutik disabilitas sebagai kerangka interpretatif. Hasil pembacaan menunjukkan tiga temuan utama: pertama, pengalaman disabilitas tervalidasi dalam hadirat Allah melalui tubuh Yesus yang terluka; kedua, Allah digambarkan sebagai sosok yang berbelas kasih dan hadir dalam penderitaan manusia; ketiga, Roh Kudus memprakarsai persekutuan yang menjunjung kesetaraan dan keadilan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa narasi Yohanes 20:19-23 mengandung nilai-nilai inklusivitas yang kuat, dan dapat menjadi dasar teologis bagi gereja untuk merangkul IDD secara setara.

**Kata Kunci:** Hermeneutika; Yesus; Disabilitas; Gereja dan Tubuh

## INTRODUCTION

The presence of people with disabilities (IDD) in general is still very rare in theological narratives whose application makes them lose their identity in the church environment. This is because the Bible, which is considered the authoritative source of Christian theological narratives, is full of negative content towards IDD. In the Bible, IDD are often stigmatized and marginalized in the social sphere as despicable, poor, bad, weak, vulnerable, and dependent on others.<sup>1</sup> The implication is that hermeneutics of biblical texts from a disability-friendly perspective are rare. This makes the author interested in reading the Bible from a disability perspective by taking the text of John 20:19-23. This text recounts the appearance of Jesus to the disciples after His resurrection. John 20:19-23 contains the scene of Jesus' disciples who locked themselves up for fear of the Jews, then Jesus appeared by showing the scars of crucifixion on His body, and sent the disciples as He was sent by the Father, filling them with the Holy Spirit and giving them authority to forgive sins.

In response to the text of John 20:19-23, several interpreters elaborate on it using different perspectives. First, Martin Aaron, explained that the wounds on the hands and stomach as typical of Jesus' resurrection body were a sign of identification for the disciples of Jesus' identity.<sup>2</sup> Aaron in his interpretation emphasizes the topic of Jesus' mission to the disciples by stating that Jesus' second greeting of peace and the exhalation of the Spirit is a mission of reconciliation and forgiveness that the disciples need to convey to the world.<sup>3</sup> The authority of the disciples in forgiving sins he attributes to the Catholic interpretation that considers this mission to be given only to the eleven disciples and then continued by the priests by delivering the word of God's forgiveness of one's sins after baptism. On the other hand, the Reformation interpretation understands the mission to be for all of Jesus' disciples to convey the forgiveness of sins before baptism. It is this mission of forgiveness that then makes the church have the authority to declare sin and forgive someone's sin.

Second, Eko Riyadi, divides the text into two parts, namely the theme of introduction (verses 19-20) and the theme of mission (verses 21-23).<sup>4</sup> In the theme of introduction, the information in verse 19 regarding the description of the time, place, and environment of the apparition has theological significance. For example, the first day of the week, which later became a holy day for Christians, replaced the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition. Riyadi then interpreted the significance of the wounds on Jesus' hands and stomach as an affirmation of the identity of the risen Jesus who was present among the disciples as the Jesus who had been with them. Compared to Harun, Riyadi himself seems to pay more attention to the theme of mission with the foundation of the disciples' mission based on the Father's mission to Jesus. The exhalation of the Holy Spirit that accompanies the mission is interpreted by Riyadi in the theme of creation when God breathed the breath of life into Adam and the Book of Ezekiel which tells the story of the exhalation of the spirit over the dry bones of the Israelites which gave new life.

Third, Bruce Milne, who understands that the resurrection has not only individual, but also social impact. He explains the application of this text by referring to the development of Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Saul M Olyan, "Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences," *New York*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Harun, *Yohanes Injil Cinta Kasih*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Harun.

<sup>4</sup> St Eko Riyadi, *Yohanes, Firman Menjadi Manusia*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2011.

experience beginning with the act of loving Christ through a personal relationship with Him, then leading to the act of love in fellowship and participation together in the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> From here, Milne also pays attention to the sending scene because it contains several meanings. Firstly, the communion of the Triune God in the inter-relationship between the Sender (the Father) and the Sent (the Son) which is later applied in the ecclesiastical mission. Second, the continuation of Jesus' work must be done in obedience. Third, the mission journey is not easy, just like Jesus who went through the path of suffering. Fourth, there is always the assurance of Jesus' presence to each of His messengers.

From the three interpreters above, it can be seen that the interpretation of the text of John 20:19-23 tends to be focused in the light of the mission, namely the sending by Jesus to the disciples. In addition, there is also a starting point for understanding the text that is dominated by the historical-critical tradition by reading the text based on the cultural context when the text was written without paying attention to the contextualization of the text.<sup>6</sup> When John's Gospel was written, there was the threat of gnostic teachings about the body being inferior to the soul and docetism that denied the humanity of Jesus. This makes the event of Jesus' wounded body in the text of John 20:19-23 simply read in an apologetic discourse against these teachings by emphasizing that the crucified Jesus is the same as the risen Jesus, as Luis M. Bermejo explains.<sup>7</sup> In addition, according to Adjai A. Sutama, the story of Jesus' appearance sometimes only reaches a contradictory understanding.<sup>8</sup> In the historical perspective, the resurrection of Jesus is not considered a historical story that really happened, but rather just a spiritual experience of the congregation at that time who believed that Jesus had and would always live. While the conservative perspective interprets the resurrection story literally, so that the resurrection of Jesus is believed to be an accurate historical event.<sup>9</sup>

Several researchers have discussed the Gospel of John in relation to disability hermeneutics and its implications for the church. First, research that discusses the importance of active participation of people with disabilities in the church, as well as criticizing theological views that have the potential to perpetuate stigma.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, research that describes disability as part of God's wondrous creation, rejecting stigma and the view that the rise of eradicating disability.<sup>11</sup> Third, research that offers a theology of hope in a post-pandemic context, with an emphasis on wounded bodies and existential struggles.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, research that highlights the risen Christ with his wounds as a symbol of vulnerable humanity and solidarity with the marginalized.<sup>13</sup> Fifth, research that analyzes the role of the church in reconciliation and humanization amid religious

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Milne, P Manyonyo, and Henk Van Der Velde, *Yohanes Libatlah Rajamu!* (Yayasan Komunikasi Bina Kasih, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Yusak B Setyawan and Pendalaman Kristologi–Perkenalan, *Teologi Disabilitas: Hand-Out* (Salatiga, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Luis Lugo et al., “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society,” *Pew Research Center*, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-exec.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> A A Sutama, *Yesus Tidak Bangkit?* (BPK Gunung Mulia, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Setyawan and Kristologi–Perkenalan, *Teologi Disabilitas: Hand-Out*.

<sup>10</sup> Louise Gosbell, “‘The Body of Christ Is Disabled Without the Presence of People with Disability’: A Re-Evaluation,” *Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology* 22, no. 2 (2024): 50–60.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Brock, *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ* (Baylor University Press, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Johnson Thomaskutty, “Normal, Post-Normal and New Normal: A Theology of Hope in John 20: 1–29,” *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022).

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Miers, “The Liberation of The Disabled Christ and What That Shows Us About Our Human Sacredness in Healthcare,” *Obscura* 18, no. 1 (2025): 185–200.

pluralism<sup>14</sup> Overall, the studies mentioned have not specifically addressed the interpretation of John 20:19-23 with a hermeneutical approach.

The interpretation of John 20:19-23 that focuses more on the framework of mission and historical-critical issues then makes the author want to take a different interpretive step, namely by conducting a hermeneutic study of the text of John 20:19-23 using a disability theology approach. The text of John 20:19-23 was chosen because it contains the kerygma or essence of the Gospel and the tradition of Jesus' wounded body-which can be understood as Jesus experiencing disability-as an integral part of the Christian faith. The use of a disability theology perspective on John 20:19-23 is an attempt to deconstruct the meaning of the text from an IDD perspective, which is not only done in the context of liberating oppressed humanity, but also liberating biblical texts that have also been colonized by the culture of normalism.

Approaching John 20:19-23 with a disability hermeneutic process is intended to show the partiality of the text towards IDD and to present IDD in theological narratives that have rarely been done so far. In the end, the hermeneutic in disability theology approach seeks to present the heritage of Christian tradition that can be a constructive and creative force for the creation of church inclusiveness. The purpose of the research is to understand the narrative of Jesus' self-appearance in the Gospel of John 20:19-23 using a hermeneutic study of disability theology perspective and to provide relevance of the text to the church in addressing disability issues.

In the academic realm, hermeneutic studies using a disability perspective on biblical texts, especially John 20:19-23, are still very rare. Therefore, the author hopes that this research can become one of the references in the academic world and readers in general who are interested in the field of hermeneutics to understand the text of John 20:19-23 and other biblical texts through a perspective that liberates and favors disability issues. The author also hopes that this research can contribute praxis to the church in addressing disability issues, such as presenting IDD in theological narratives and policies in church life.

## Method

The study of the narrative of John 20:19-23 in this study will be conducted through a hermeneutic approach in the perspective of disability theology.<sup>15</sup> This approach was chosen as an attempt to offer a more inclusive and transformative way of reading the biblical text, especially by involving the experiences and realities of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). So far, the narrative of John 20:19-23 tends to be read through a missionary framework or a historical-critical approach that emphasizes the author's background and intentions in the past, but often ignores the relevance of the text for marginalized groups in the present. By using the lens of disability theology, the reading of this text is directed to uncover new meanings that are more empowering and open space for participation of people with disabilities in the community of faith.

The principles of hermeneutics in the perspective of disability will be described systematically as a theoretical basis used to read and interpret the text. This hermeneutic not only

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<sup>14</sup> Eklepinus Jefry Sopacuaperu, "Misi Rekonsiliasi Dalam Konteks Kemajemukan Agama Di Indonesia: Analisis Naratif Yohanes 20: 19-23 Dan Implikasi Misiologisnya," *KENOSIS: Jurnal Kajian Teologi* 6, no. 1 (2020): 64–84.

<sup>15</sup> Kresbinol Labobar, *Dasar-Dasar Hermeneutik: Metode Penafsiran Alkitab Yang Mudah Dan Tepat* (PBMR ANDI, 2021).

highlights theological aspects, but also looks at power relations, body representation, and the lived experiences of people with disabilities that have been less accommodated in mainstream interpretations. Thus, this method is not just a technique of interpretation, but also a theological stance that favors inclusivity and justice. Through this reading, it is hoped that the text of John 20:19-23 will not only be seen as a narrative of sending disciples, but also as a message of liberation and acceptance for those who have been excluded from theological spaces.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Thomas E. Reynolds: Disability Hermeneutics as an Autocritique of Biblical Normalism

Reynolds realizes that disability stories in the Bible tend to be superficial because IDD is often not considered as a subject and person of their own experience. Yet according to Reynolds, the Bible actually records perspectives that celebrate diversity and the fullness of human life created in the image of God. This, according to him, is shown in the narrative of Christ's resurrection with wounded hands, feet and stomach. Christ's wounded body represents a God who understands and experiences disability by embracing disability itself in His resurrection body.<sup>16</sup> Reynolds then offers a way of addressing the biblical text by conducting a hermeneutic process from a critical disability perspective.

The hermeneutic of disability that Reynolds refers to is an interpretation of the Bible that makes room to read the Bible “against itself” without the intention of discarding texts that are irrelevant or harsh towards IDD, because such an attitude is irresponsible. This statement by Reynolds gives two important emphases. The first emphasis is on reading the Bible “against itself”, which means that the Bible needs to be seen as a book that is open to criticism and even needs to autocriticize the culture of normalism that is rooted in it. Within this framework, Reynolds recognizes that the Bible was written in a plural context and is a compilation of various understandings and theological goals, none of which are absolute. Her autocriticism aims to destroy the impartiality of biblical texts that have perpetuated rejection and discrimination against IDD. Therefore, criticism in the disability hermeneutic process is never monologic but dialogic, i.e. there is criticism of the Bible against the interpreter's interpretation and context, as well as criticism from the interpreter against the Bible.

The second emphasis is on the responsible process of interpreting the Bible. Since disability hermeneutics does not stop at objectively extracting the history of the text, but also recognizes the subjectivity of the interpreter, in the form of preconceptions and contextualization of the text, the interpreter may be trapped in arbitrary subjectivity. Based on this, the hermeneutic process of disability requires responsible and accountable interpretive ethics. Responsible interpretation refers to the internal realm, namely the efforts and dedication of the interpreter in carrying out the hermeneutic process with the selection of appropriate and responsible theories and methods, while accountability of interpretation leads to the external realm that makes the results of the hermeneutic process have ethical consequences that can be accounted to the public.<sup>17</sup> Thus, disability hermeneutics is not an activity that uses biblical passages irresponsibly for the sake of a theological interest, but through which public understanding of disability can be reconstructed.

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas E Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Brazos Press, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (1988): 3–17.

This ethical consequence means that the results of disability hermeneutics are never rigid, but remain open to criticism, dialogue and renewal.

### **Amos Yong: Trialectics in Disability Hermeneutics, Toward a Disability-Friendly Community**

According to Amos Yong, in doing disability hermeneutics of biblical texts that always have tensions between the context of the text and the context of the interpreter, it is very necessary to base the interpretation on the history and stability of the text, as well as the experience and intentions of the interpreter.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Yong introduced a trialectic in disability hermeneutics. Trialectics is a process of interpretation that seeks to balance the elements of objectivity and subjectivity, method and experience, and knowledge and reality in interpretation. Trialectics does not see one element of interpretation as more important than another, which could potentially make interpretation fall into dangerous objectivity or subjectivity. Trialectics, by Yong, has three distinctions, but they are inseparable, interrelated, and mutually supportive, which is then metaphorized as the Holy Spirit-Word-Community in a harmonious perichoretic relationship.<sup>19</sup> In Yong's presentation, the Holy Spirit represents an interpreter's subjectivity that emphasizes critical self-reflection in determining personal and social motivations and intentions, as well as goals that influence interpretive activity.

For Yong, the Holy Spirit has: a relational aspect that connects God and the Son, as well as God and humans; a rational aspect that moves a person in feelings, experiences, and thinking dynamics; and as a source of power that renews, gives life, and strength to the community.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the Word refers to the objectivity of the text that has gone through a long process in a dynamic historical context, so that indirectly the interpreter will be influenced by the responses and perspectives of others. For Yong, the Word has an objective aspect that recognizes the message of the author of the text as one of the interpreter's guidelines in interpreting. In addition, in the element of the Word, the divine authority of the biblical text is recognized. The Word for him refers to Christ himself as the living Word of God, in whom all theological meaning-seeking activities are centered. Then, the role of community in Yong's trialectic relates to the contextualization of the text or the realm of theological praxis where the biblical text is witnessed, experienced, and lived in a community of faith that supports each other. This community is based on an understanding of fellowship in the body of Christ that has united all differences in harmony.

In relation to disability hermeneutics, this kind of trialectic is able to respond to disability not only as an individual issue, but interpersonal and institutional, so that the reading of biblical texts is no longer just criticizing stigmatization, segregation, and discrimination against IDD, but also seeks to free communities, institutions, and churches from normalism in order to become a friendly space for everyone, especially IDD.<sup>21</sup> Communities based on the unity of the body of Christ must be inclusive and strive for a new paradigm in biblical interpretation that understands that disability is not only in the human body, but also embraced in the life of God himself, that is, embodied in the image of Christ who is the God of disability. The Christian celebration of the

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<sup>18</sup> Amos Yong, "The Hermeneutical Trialectic: Notes toward a Consensual Hermeneutic and Theological Method," *The Heythrop Journal* 45, no. 1 (2004): 22–39.

<sup>19</sup> Yong.

<sup>20</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> (Yong 2007)

life, death and resurrection of Christ is a reminder that the core faith of the Christian community can never be separated from the testimony of the wounded body of the disabled Christ.

In addition, the trialectic in disability hermeneutics leads Yong to the understanding that the Holy Spirit as a creative and relational force works to create new communities in diversity that promote justice and equality, not communities that emphasize normal body standards. The Holy Spirit is not a power that aims to fix IDD bodies that are often considered damaged to become ideal bodies, but rather a power that creates diversity, so that the image of God is never singular.<sup>22</sup> This work of the Holy Spirit emphasizes the restoration of the wholeness of community with God, as well as providing space for active participation for all people, including those with IDD who are often seen as weak. Because of this, the hermeneutic trialectic of disability seeks to interpret biblical texts not from the lens of normalism that seeks to homogenize the body to an ideal standard, but from the lens of disability that appreciates the multiplicity of the body.

### **Deborah Beth Creamer: Disability Hermeneutics as a Theology of the Bod**

Creamer centered his theology on the disability schema on the basis of his critique of the normalist view that monopolized the human body, even the body of God.<sup>23</sup> Creamer argues that dismissing disability will cause people to fail to reflect on the full experience of life and make theological understanding impoverished because it has failed to recognize difference as an important aspect of the metaphor of God's body. Creamer was then inspired by Sallie McFague's embodiment theology which states that God is indeed transcendent, but also immanent. Through Christ, God has embraced all human bodies, even the excluded ones, so that God is a God who relates without becoming identical with human beings God embodies in human beings and human beings embody in God.

This view of God's immanence to human embodiment contributes to the disability hermeneutic of the image of God. In relation to this depiction of God, Creamer states that his theology is metaphorical, so it is important to remember that everything described about God is never singular and absolute. A metaphorical understanding recognizes the diversity of experiences and interpretations that can be offered by humans from various states of being.<sup>24</sup> This means that the metaphors of God in the Bible, which have been dominated by normalist culture, are never absolute. God being embodied in all human beings and all human beings being embodied in God then has two implications for biblical interpretation: it is both universal and particular. First, it is universal, which means that all human beings without exception experience God and God also enters into human experience without exception, so that no one human experience is superior to another. As such, the image of God experienced by those without IDD is never superior to the image of God experienced by IDD.

This view does not make the image of God relative, but rather enriched, because then God is pleased to participate in all aspects of human life, including disability. Secondly, it is particular, because the bodily experience of human beings is always polyphonic, unique and different. God who relates to all human beings, even those with IDD, brings a new perspective that shows that

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<sup>22</sup> Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Baylor University Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Deborah Creamer, "Including All Bodies in the Body of God: Disability and the Theology of Sallie McFague," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 9, no. 4 (2006): 55–69.

<sup>24</sup> Creamer.

God respects differences and does not reject the condition of disability.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, the experience of IDD needs to be taken into account and celebrated within the framework of reading the Bible from a disability perspective.

### **Disability in the Gospel Context of John 20:19-23**

According to Riyadi, the tradition behind the Gospel of John is the Old Testament and Jewish tradition, as well as Hellenism and gnosticism. In John 20:19-23, the author of John's Gospel does not intentionally describe the situation of loneliness and fear of the disciples after Jesus' death and focuses on the state of Jesus' wounded body during the apparition. This has a bearing on the precarious situation that John's congregation was experiencing at the time. Aaron explained that those who believed in Jesus were ostracized from the temple and society by the Jews because they were considered to have renounced Jewish monotheism and made Jesus a second god. John's congregation at that time was also experiencing divisions due to differences in theological understanding consisting of groups that only emphasized the humanity of Jesus and groups that only emphasized the divinity of Jesus. This was because John's audience was engaged in a syncretic mindset that mixed Jewish understanding and Greek philosophy, especially gnosticism that held dualistic views, such as the light-dark or flesh-spirit opposition.<sup>26</sup> It was this gnostic understanding that gave birth to a theological view based on docetism (emphasizing the divinity of Jesus alone) in the church.

Based on the above situation, Riyadi believes that the Gospel of John was written to strengthen the believers' faith in Jesus in the face of the persecution they endured from the Jews.<sup>27</sup> In addition, according to Barnabas Lindars, John's Gospel reflects a resistance to theological issues in his congregation at that time, such as gnosticism and docetism which were considered heresies.<sup>28</sup> In line with this, Milne writes that the tendency towards docetism in Roman-Greek culture led the Gospel of John to be written with the aim of opposing this heresy, thus in its writing, the Gospel of John emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. Unlike gnosticism and docetism, the Gospel of John does not contradict Jesus' humanity and divinity, but rather argues that Jesus' divinity is inseparable from His humanity.

This dualistic gnosticism also rejected the incarnation of Jesus based on the notion of opposing the body as evil and the spirit as good, so that gnosticism understood that it was impossible for God to be incarnated in the bodily world which is contrary to God who is the Good Spirit.<sup>29</sup> Gnosticism has several views of God. First, in spatial dualism, the position of heaven as the abode of God is superior to the earth as the world of humans. The spirit world where God resides is pure and holy, while the material world including the body is bad and evil.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, theological dualism explicitly contrasts God and human beings, because God is holy, so He does not relate to the material world. Thirdly, docetism born out of gnosticism considers Jesus to be

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<sup>25</sup> Creamer.

<sup>26</sup> C Groenen and Pengantar Ke Dalam Perjanjian Baru, *Mengenal Latar Belakang Dan Tiap-Tiap Karangannya* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Riyadi, *Yohanes, Firman Menjadi Manusia*.

<sup>28</sup> Barnabas Lindars, "The New Century Bible Commentary. The Gospel of John," *Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company* 182 (1981): 18.

<sup>29</sup> Andreas J Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Baker Academic, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> John Drane, *Memahami Perjanjian Baru* (BPK Gunung Mulia, 1996).



an entirely divine figure who is only human in appearance, making it impossible for the divine Jesus to die on the cross.<sup>31</sup>

The implications of this understanding of the divine have a discriminatory impact on disability. Jesus, understood as the divine alone, makes Him a God who has no solidarity with human suffering. This is due to the understanding that the divine cannot be limited or disabled. As a result, the concept of God being immanent with human suffering is not accommodated in the experience of IDD. The emphasis on God as a highly transcendent Spirit leads God to be seen as a God who shuns human embodiment which is a symbol of limitation and evil. God is ultimately understood as a God who rejects and is anti-disability. The understanding of a God who rejects embodiment gives an eschatological understanding that death only applies to the human body which is temporal and limited, while the human spirit which is eternal will continue to live with God in the spirit realm.<sup>32</sup> This means that in the presence of God, human limitations are unacceptable.

The context of John's Gospel is in the shadow of Jewish syncretism and gnosticism that is destructive to disability issues, but the author of John's Gospel shows a theology that clashes violently with the context of gnosticism and instead presents a gospel that embraces disability. This is implied in John's attempt to degnosticize the resurrection body of Jesus. Degnostization is an attempt by the author of the Gospel of John to present Jesus in contrast to gnostic teachings as a form of opposition to teachings that were considered heretical at that time.<sup>33</sup>

Compared to the three Synoptic Gospels, it is John who pays the most attention to the state of Jesus' resurrection body. Although the Gospel of Luke 24:36-40 also records a similar scene of the appearance of Jesus' body, John takes this more seriously by twice presenting the risen Jesus with a body bearing the marks of crucifixion, namely in the appearances in John 20:19-23 and 20:24-29. This is a form of John's gospel's opposition to gnosticism, which is at odds with the theology of John's gospel, so anti-gnostic traces are highlighted in John's writings. In gnosticism, the material world is considered evil and a prison for the spirit, so the moral aspects of the world become irrelevant because salvation comes from knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, resurrection does not require bodily aspects, but rather a spirit that is considered good and eternal. This understanding is opposed by the Gospel of John by degnosticizing the resurrection body of Jesus. The legitimacy of Jesus' resurrection is actually presented by John by highlighting the state of Jesus' body. The resurrected Jesus is not shown in the form of a holy and perfect spirit, but with a body that carries the marks of suffering from the crucifixion. This denormalization of Jesus' resurrection body is the meeting point of the interpretation of the Gospel of John 20:19-23 as a text that also denormalizes the biblical context that discriminates against IDD. John has implicitly denormalized the gnostic notion that devalues the body. Through the nail-holed resurrection body of Jesus, the limited aspects of the body are highlighted in a friendly and different way.

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<sup>31</sup> W R F Browning, *Kamus Alkitab (Sc)* (BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Urban C Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of the Johannine Literature and Why It Matters*, vol. 517 (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Ioanes Rahmat, "Yesus, Maria Magdalena, Yudas Dan Makam Keluarga," *Banten: Sirao Credentia Center*, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of the Johannine Literature and Why It Matters*.

### **Interpreting the Gospel of John 20:19-23 with Disability Hermeneutics Jesus with a Wounded Body is a God Who Embraces Disability**

The appearance of Jesus in verse 20a explains that "...He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord." The parts of Jesus' body that are highlighted in this verse are His hands and His stomach or in the original language τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν. Instead of showing hands and feet like the parallel verse in Luke 24:19, John is more interested in using πλευρὰν or stomach to narrate the appearance of Jesus. This is because John wanted to imply that the wound on the πλευρὰν of Jesus' resurrection body was the same wound on the πλευρὰν of Jesus' crucifixion body as recorded in John 19:31-37 about Jesus' stomach being stabbed to ensure that Jesus was really dead at that time. It is a continuity that John emphasizes that the Jesus who died on the cross is the Jesus who rose to appear. This continuity of Jesus' wounded body is an important concern for John because the condition of John's congregation at that time was struggling with gnosticism and docetism which rejected the humanity of Jesus because they thought that the body was evil, so that Jesus who was fully divine could not die, but Jesus' divinity left His body shortly before He died on the cross. This gnosticism led to skepticism in John's congregation. There was a group that believed that Jesus remained dead and did not rise, only the spirit of Jesus appeared or could.<sup>35</sup>

John countered these views by presenting the wounds on His hands and stomach as an affirmation that the Jesus who actually died on the cross was indeed the risen Jesus who appeared. John confirms the apparition event as not a hallucination while highlighting Jesus' divinity by explaining "The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord." The word see or ἰδόντες that John uses comes from the verb ὁράω which can also mean to experience. There are indications that the word ὁράω refers to a mere spiritual experience or vision, but the context of the use of ἰδόντες in John refers to the actual event when the disciples actually experienced and saw the risen Jesus. Furthermore, the word Lord or Κύριον in this appearance was essential for John to affirm the divinity of Jesus which was then doubted by a group of people.

Viewed from the perspective of disability, John's text has actually resisted the seeds of normalism present in gnosticism at that time. This attitude, according to Reynolds, is an autocriticism of the Bible itself against the culture of normalism that took root in it. This opinion is confirmed by the following arguments. Firstly, John dares to present the character of God in contrast to gnosticism's view of God as transcendent above the body. In this story, Jesus' divinity is legitimized and inseparable from His humanity. Jesus appears as God who is immanent and does not shy away from embodiment, which is considered a disability. John opposes the normalism in gnostic teachings that want to monopolize the image of God by implying that everything described about God is never singular and absolute.

The solid concept of a holy and perfect God in gnosticism is broken by John's emphasis on the nail-holed hands and stomach of Jesus from the crucifixion. This wounded body of Jesus represents God who also experiences disability by embracing disability itself into Himself. God has embraced all of humanity, so God is truly a God of relationship. John's focus on Jesus' stomach as a synchronization to Jesus' death and the mention of God as an acknowledgement of Jesus' divinity also contains a resistance to gnosticism that believes that Jesus, who is God, cannot

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<sup>35</sup> Tom Wright, *John for Everyone: Part Two, Chapters 11—21*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

experience death. The description of the wound on Jesus' stomach here shows that even the climax of all human disabilities, namely mortality, was actually experienced by Jesus. This confirms that there is no experience of limitation, infirmity, and death that is outside of God. Jesus is God who is in solidarity with the experience of human limitations and suffering.

Secondly, the concept of the body as evil, low and bad in gnosticism is opposed by John. In gnostic teachings, the resurrection event is so confined to the discourse of normalist eschatology that the resurrected body is an expression of heavenly perfection as a negation of earthly conditions full of limitations because all forms of disability will be eliminated, so that in the resurrection there will be no more wounds and signs of disability. However, Jesus' resurrection body expressed the exact opposite. The scars on Jesus' hands and stomach indicate that Jesus' resurrection body bears the marks of disability, not wholeness and perfection. Resurrection as a form of eschatological event gets a different definition in the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus with a wounded body shows that the main dimension of resurrection is not synonymous with perfection, but the intimacy of God who participates in human wounds and vulnerability. God who relates to human bodily experience shows that God respects and does not reject the condition of disability.

Jesus' stigmata remove the stigma of disability and give new meaning to the body. When Jesus' divine identity is validated through his scarred body, the body is not a symbol of evil and shame. Therefore, bodies with disabilities are not rejected, but rather recognized and embraced in the presence of God. The above description of Jesus' wounded resurrection body contains Creamer's view of disability as an open minority, even to the extent that disability is not just a human experience, but has become part of the divine experience. As Yong argues, disability is not only in the human body, but also embraced in the life of God himself, that is, embodied in the image of Christ who is the disabled God.<sup>108</sup> Thus, disability is not only a part of human identity, but also in the identity of divinity itself.

## CONCLUSION

The reading of John 20:19-23 in the perspective of disability presents a new understanding that confirms that the experience of disability is not only recognized, but also embraced in Jesus' divine identity. Jesus' wounded body becomes a symbol of God's solidarity with human suffering and limitations. In this narrative, Jesus appears as a disabled God, a God who is present in human fear and pain. In addition, the communion formed through the Holy Spirit emphasizes equality, love, and justice, rejecting all forms of discrimination against individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

This research provides theological as well as practical contributions for the church in building an inclusive attitude towards IDD. The three main ideas of disability hermeneutics can be used as a foundation for churches to create disability-friendly spaces, formulate policies that take into account the interests of IDD, and build faith communities that are equal and without discrimination. Moreover, the church is expected to fight for the rights of IDD in the wider community as a tangible manifestation of God's mission of love and justice.

Based on the findings in this study, it is suggested that future research examine the application of disability hermeneutics in the context of church liturgy and worship. This focus is important to see the extent to which theological understanding that is inclusive of people with disabilities can be translated into concrete worship practices. Further research can explore

disability-friendly forms of liturgy, the active participation of people with disabilities in the implementation of worship, and the congregation's perception of these changes. Thus, the church not only understands inclusive theology theoretically, but also realizes it in real worship life.

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