>> Ben: Welcome to our webinar! We are so grateful that you're here with us today. My name is Ben Bond. I am the Faith Inclusion and Belonging Associate here at RespectAbility. Today we are getting to talk about disability representations in the New Testament, and we have some incredible guests here today, some brilliant Scholars and theologians. And to get us started off, I would love to share some accessibility reminders for this webinar. All webinars hosted by RespectAbility have ASL interpreters and live CART captioning included, including this one. So our wonderful interpreter, Mara, who is currently signing with the blue screen behind her. And you are able to turn on captions using the CC button in Zoom, or view the live transcript in a separate window using the link in the chat. This webinar is being recorded and will be posted to our website later this week after open captions are added to the recording. And our wonderful Communications manager Eric has put into the chat the link for captioning. So I'll start off by giving a visual description, which is helpful for those who are blind or low vision, and is an accessibility practice we do here at RespectAbility and in the disability community more widely. My name is Ben Bond, once again. I use he/they pronouns. I am a white person who is very masculine presenting. I have a large brown beard, brown hair, and brown glasses, and I'm wearing a white shirt with a gray background with the RespectAbility motto. And I will pass it to my co-moderator, Angela Molloy, to give her visual description, we'll read the bios of our presenters, and we'll get into this wonderful conversation together.

>> Angela: Thank you so much Ben. My name is Angela Molloy. I use she/her pronouns. And I am the Faith Inclusion and Belonging Fellow at RespectAbility. I am a young congenitally disabled woman with long brown hair, a blue sweater, and our gray virtual background. It is my great joy to read a bio for our first presenter, Dr. Amy Kenny. Dr. Amy Kenny is a disabled scholar practitioner, whose writing has been featured in Teen Vogue, Sojourners, Shondaland, Readerâ€™s Digest, Huff Post, and in her award-winning book, "My Body Is Not A Prayer Request." She served on the Mayor's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion task force, and as the facilitator for Freedom Road Institute for Leadership and Justice. She is currently the inaugural Director of the Disability Cultural Center at Georgetown University, which seeks to celebrate the diverse disability community and cultivate a culture of access across campus. Thank you for joining us Dr. Kenny.

>> Amy: This is Amy. Thank you for having me. I'll start with my visual description. I am a disabled white Australian woman, wearing blue with pink stars so that you think I'm fun. And I'm sitting in my mobility scooter that is bedazzled with a W for Wonder Woman, so you remember who you're talking to. Great to be here!

>> Ben: Thank you so much Dr. Kenny. I also forgot to mention that I am also disabled and sitting in a very comfortable chair to help mitigate my chronic pain. For many of us on the call, we know what that's like. And I have the distinct honor and pleasure to introduce the Reverend Dr. Lamar Hardwick. Dr. Hardwick is known as the autism pastor, and is a pastor and cancer survivor, PhD student, and award-winning author focused on the intersection of disability, race, and religion. Hardwick was diagnosed with autism at the age of 36. He provides workshops and consults with businesses, churches, and universities, and faith-based organizations on becoming more disability inclusive. He's a graduate of Candler School of Theology at Emory University, the Clergy Scholar Program at Yale Divinity, and a 2017 graduate of Georgia Forward's Young Game Changers program. He has authored four books, including his most recent book, "How Ableism Fuels Racism: Dismantling the Hierarchy of Bodies in the Church." Welcome Lamar Hardwick!

>> Lamar: Thank you. By way of my visual description, I am a black disabled man. I have on clear transparent glasses, wearing a black shirt, using black headphones, and have a -- I guess it's almost all gray now, my beard. And my background is actually my office but it is currently blurred as a virtual background.

>> Ben: Thank you so much Dr. Hardwick. This is Ben speaking. Well to get us started off, we hope to have this conversation where both Dr. Hardwick and Dr. Kenny have been on a few different webinars together and know each other's work intimately. Dr. Kenny has even provided an awesome review of Dr. Hardwick's work. So Angela and I will be offering up questions for them to answer, and also, as we say in our tradition, as the spirit moves, Dr. Hardwick and Dr. Kenny will have the opportunity to engage with each other's work here. So I'll begin by asking a question of you, Dr. Hardwick. In your new book, "How Ableism Fuels Racism: Dismantling the Hierarchy of Bodies in the Church," you talk about the intersection of racism and ableism, and how ableism is foundational to the racist structures that continue to exist today. Can you share more about this with us?

>> Lamar: Sure. So I'll first start by saying part of the -- desire to write this book was based on doing a lot of research, obviously being a disabled man, also someone who's currently undergoing treatment for stage four cancer, so in addition to autism, I have other physical disabilities that that treatment has brought about over the last four years. And so in -- researching disability, and particularly also racism, started to see a trend in a lot of historical documents that led me to believe that there are some things that are much larger at play versus racism. When I say that it is to say that oftentimes we understand sort of racism being America's initial sin, which I think, you know, there is validity to that. But I began to question through looking at historical documents, what was it that actually served as a foundation for making those distinctions? And so in other words, it wasn't just -- it wasn't just early settlers -- wasn't just early settlers and white people saying your skin color is darker than ours, so therefore, you are different. There was something that had to undergird that thought, there was something that had to give them a sort of a foundation for making the claims that they made about the racial differences. And so, you start to look at a lot of the historical documents, you start to understand that it wasn't primarily just a matter of skin color, it was that disability -- and those definitions of course continue to sort of morph and evolve over time, but at its core what we found was that disability became the foundation for making the claims about why black bodies were inherently deficient. And so disability then was used -- disability discrimination, otherwise known as ableism, was used used as a way to justify -- especially in the early colonial days what was seen as a Christian ethos of charity and benevolence, saying that black bodies, African -- enslaved Africans were inherently deficient, mentally, spiritually, and even in some cases physically. And so it was much more than just peering into an entire group of people and saying your skin color is different. It was your skin color is different, and there's a deficiency that inherently comes along with that skin color. And the use of disability was used to prop up what we now know as racial segregation and racial slavery in this country. And so you have a huge number of original documents that we were able to find that helped to solidify that research, and to show that ableism, in fact, was the thing that helped prop up racism and gave early Puritans the foundation for creating racial slavery and racial segregation in this country.

>> Ben: Yeah, I really appreciate that in the book you talk about really direct examples of how folks like Cotton Mather and the Kellogg gentleman from the Seventh Day Adventist tradition really helped kind of project disability onto black bodies through a Christian perspective, and how kind of Christian charity was somewhat weaponized as -- a tool for keeping control over enslaved and black folks within the United States, post-antebellum period. And I think that definitely ties in -- you bring some excellent examples of how the New Testament scriptures inform that as well, but I'll give Dr. Kenny and Angela a chance to respond as well.

>> Amy: This is Amy. I'm thinking about that passage, Lamar, in Revelation of -- I look before me and there's a great multitude that no one can count, and every nation, every tribe, every people, every tongue is worshipping. And I think about that a lot when I think about your brilliant book, and when I think about the intersection and amplifying of ableism and racism, and how they are connected to one another. And I think about that passage, because we often -- often that passage is talked about as this beautiful display of the multiethnic church, and we -- we leave out sometimes that folks are signing there, if every language is worshipping, that disability culture is a culture, and an identity, and a community. And when I picture that scene, I folks signing, stimming, rolling, walking, dancing, all as part of the beautiful co-flourishing and worshipping of that scene. And I wonder if there are other passages or verses or parables that you think of when you think of how ableism fuels racism in scripture -- in our interpretation of scripture.

>> Lamar: Yeah. So so many. I think just to sort of pick up on your brilliant observation about all the languages, one of the passages that I maybe over the last year had been really working through is the -- and I can't remember where it is in the New Testament, but it talks about how the spirit groans with word -- without words, right? And so there's this image of a nonverbal spirit, right, that is still communicating and communing -- both communicating and communing with God in ways that are are meaningful and helpful. And I even had an opportunity to do some work helping to create a curriculum for autistic young people, and I talked about that in one of the sessions that -- the spirit sort of reads us the way we -- we read books, right, and so there's even place for those who have non-verbal communication. But in terms of -- texts that talk about race, I don't know that it's -- explicit. A lot of those things sometimes are found in the Old Testament, which is part of sort of the challenges -- but one of the texts that I have also really worked through is the story of -- a lot of the healing narratives tend to be utilized to sort of amplify ableism and its connection to racism. But one in particular I would say would be John Chapter 5, the story of the man at the pool of Bethesda. And I'll just briefly say, one of the challenges that has always been presented to me in the way that that is interpreted is that the man's disability is often preached and presented as a disposition. And so I've often heard -- when he says can't, "I can't," when Jesus says you want to be made well. We tend to think that Jesus is scolding him, but then we also tend to treat "can't" as a curse or as a crime, and you often also see that connected with racism. When you talk about some of the things that we see in our country, we're just talking about -- for those who are watching and listening behind the scenes, we were talking about exceptionalism, and sometimes you sort of see that play out in both ableism and racism with making the connection between asserting that certain communities are not trying hard enough, and you see that connection with ableism and both -- both ableism and racism, and so I've seen that text used a lot to sort of project those ideas in the way that it is interpreted, when he's saying "can't, I don't have anyone to help me." And you tend to see minority populations being scolded as if -- we also believe Jesus scolding him for not trying hard enough. Surely by now, you've been here for 38 years, you would have figured out a way to do better for yourself, right? That's sort of the impetus of what a lot of times it's interpreted as, so -- it's not explicit, but -- I've seen texts like that being used to promote both ableism and racism by saying -- this particular minority community, whether it be women or whether it be African-Americans, whether it be disabled people, you should just try harder and you'll be able to do better for yourself. And so that's -- that's one of the ways that I see text being interpreted and used in the New Testament.

>> Angela: Thank you both for that. I think John is rife with so many excellent examples, ways to re-read passages that have been harmful. Dr. Kenny, we really appreciate how you reread passages in the New Testament like John 9 to respect the agency and the personhood of disabled characters. Can you talk us through your process of rereading scripture with an anti-ableist interpretation?

>> Amy: This is Amy. I grew up in a household where I was taught that everyone was made in the image of God, and I just had the audacity to believe that. And that's really at the root of any reading that I do of scripture, and hopefully any discernment that I do in my life as well, is recognizing that there's not an asterisk there, or a caveat saying, "oh no, not us disabled folks." And while that was not my experience often growing up in and around church as a disabled kid and then now woman, I really do believe that. So that disabled folks are treated as collateral damage of someone else's interpretation has never sat right with me. And the reading that I do of John 9 in my book, and the title of my book being "My Body is Not a Prayer Request" is a clapback, and hopefully a loving invitation to folks to rethink some of those readings, and to share some of the prophetic witness of disabled folks, even in that verse that Lamar was just sharing from Romans about we don't know what to pray for, but the spirit -- intercedes on our behalf with groans too deep to utter, and that being a type of prophetic witness of the disability community, that is about the benefits and the gains of the insights and wisdom that disabled folks have. And I think that is so often lost when we interpret these stories. I would love to ask you, Lamar, about how these interpretations that we're talking about and the exceptionalism that you've already named -- how that connects to God -- to our understanding of God. We've -- both of us talk about disabled God in our books, and I love your quote that we're so ableist that we even discriminate against God. I think that's a powerful and important quote, and we just love to learn of your thoughts about how ableism and racism connect to our discrimination against God, especially when it comes to interpreting God as disabled.

>> Lamar: Mmm. Yeah, great question. By the way, but you already know this, I love your book too, so -- and learned so much from it, and it helped me writing this most recent book. I would say that a lot of the ways that we have been historically and traditionally taught to interpret the Bible have come from eurocentric white theology, white evangelicalism, especially in this country -- I can't speak about other countries, most of our research is done here, and so -- when I talk about doing research between the intersection of race, religion, and disability, a lot of that starts with the understanding that much of what has been in a lot of our embedded theology has come from a singular mindset and a singular group of people who have interpreted scripture in an -- oftentimes a very singular way. One of the things that I talk about in my book is to think about the ways in which a lot of new interpretations and new understandings of scripture have to come from the outside in, right? And so an example of that -- if you talk about the intersection of race and disability is you think about those same enslaved Africans who were being told that they inherently deficient and they're inherently disabled by skin color, were also the ones who said, you know, we don't feel as though we are obligated to accept your interpretation of scripture that says that persons with dark color skin are inherently disabled and deficient, right? And so had it not been for enslaved Africans and then that transforming into -- the historically black church, we wouldn't have gotten interpretation -- alternate interpretations of scripture that said that black bodies are not inherently disabled, and that they are not ahistorical, that they are actually very intelligent beings. But it took for that -- for that group of people -- that community that was being disenfranchised to provide an alternate interpretation of scriptures that were being used to disenfranchise them. And so I would say in the same way I see as you talk about, like, the prophetic witness of the disability community, and the way that oftentimes scriptures can be interpreted by our community, I see the exact same trajectory with disabled people saying, look -- we don't feel obligated to have to accept these interpretations that have historically disenfranchised us. And some of the best ways that we begin to see new insights and garner new information and broaden and deepen our theology about God is to listen to a group that has been historically disenfranchised and to listen to their interpretations of the exact same scriptures that have been used to disenfranchise them. So that's why I feel like a lot of your work and so many other people's work in the disability community is important, because you sort of see the same trajectory with the disability community that you saw with enslaved Africans saying, no, you know, we're not buying that. We're not buying that your interpretation of the scripture is correct in saying that black people are inferior. And so in the same way the disability community is saying we're not buying that, we're not buying your interpretations of scripture and the way that you are utilizing to disenfranchise disabled bodies are in fact the correct and only way to interpret those scriptures. And so a lot of the intersection that I see comes in between those two marginalized communities being, what I believe to be [audio issues] great trajectory for a lot of what which is some people don't like the word but you hear deconstruction you'll hear -- evolution of faith. I found that that actually typically best comes from those groups who are expressing their interpretation of scripture, and expressing it to the communities that most harm them with what they feel to be erroneous interpretation of scripture. So there's so much value in the connection between disability [audio issues] because those two communities that brings liberation and brings freedom to two historically marginalized groups.

>> Ben: Dr. Hardwick, I feel like you've actually answered a question that I had in a really beautiful way. I'll offer it still, though, if you have other thoughts. You write about the strategic role of euro-Christianity in developing a hierarchy of bodies. Can you talk to us about the New Testament scriptures that were used to create this hierarchy of bodies? I know you've mentioned John already. And how could those same scriptures be reimagined to be more life affirming? So I mean, you've definitely talked about -- just there -- how enslaved communities reinterpret -- said we're not buying those interpretations and we're changing those to be reimagined to be more life affirming. I'd love to hear, like -- some examples of how those scriptures have been reimagined or how they could be reimagined to be more life affirming for the disability community?

>> Lamar: Yes, so I'll go back to John 5, and then I'll mention another one. So I'm going to assume that most of the listeners know this. If not, it's basically the story about a community of disabled people who gather at the pool. There -- there are -- I'll say for lack of a better term, rumors, or this legend that at a certain season, the water will begin to be what's described as troubled, and those who are able to jump in first are healed. And so one of the things that I previously talked about is about how a lot of times in the ways that those -- that story is interpreted is that we focus on the man's response to Jesus saying, I can't, I have no one to help me. And again we sort of treat "can't" [audio issues] like a crime or some sort of curse, right, that there's obviously some sort of issue that this man has that he doesn't -- he's not trying hard enough to be better, to be healed, to be well, all of these different synonyms that we use to really promote [audio issues] in sort of a low-key way body normativity, right? And so if you really want to be like us, you would tried harder to find a way to make your way into the pool. There's a lot of ways -- how that's interpreted. And the reason I bring that up again is because of often times in sort of a white eurocentric way, if you back up and [audio issues] understand a lot of what the ethos of -- early Christianity was, and even the culture that was the -- that Puritans were attempting to create, was one of mastery. Mastery in those days simply meant getting as close as you can to a able-body white male, right? So when you interpret it through that lens, then what you start to interpret in that scripture is instead of noticing that Jesus doesn't actually -- that Jesus doesn't actually scold the man, that he was the man what he needs, you actually end up interpreting through the lens of Mastery, meaning try harder, right? Try harder to be like us, try harder to have a normal body, try harder to do normal things, and then somehow maybe you'll ascend to the apex of the human experience, which is to be a white able-bodied male, right? That's sort of that text. So in -- in that interpretation and in that lens, you find oftentimes his disability being something that is treated akin to a disposition. And so here's where you get those types of things like the only bad attitude -- or the only disability is a bad attitude, right, if you just tried harder, right? And so historically you get some of where that comes from is because mastery, and to become as close to a able-body white male was always the agenda and the goal. You begin to interpret scripture [audio issues] right? So the focus becomes on him saying I can't, and that way "can't," again, is seen as a curse or seen as a -- no try harder, be more like us. Another place where I see sort of that lens being applied is the story of the -- I think it calls, I'll say for -- use a biblical term the lame man who was brought to Jesus in the house, and the roof was torn off, right? What's troubling about the way that that's often interpreted and preached is that the man has no agency. I'm not even sure he has a voice -- the text even talks about and there's a lot of focus on, according to their faith, right? And so in a lot of ways it's paternalistic, which is a key feature of ableism, right? You don't know how to do for yourself, and so we're going to take it upon ourselves and use our faith to make sure that the healing that you don't even realize you need becomes a part of your life story. And Amy talks about this so well in her book about people assuming that disabled people's bodies are public property and that, because I have faith and obviously you don't, I'm going to assure [audio issues] we will pray for the healing, but we don't know what this man wants, right, we don't know what his desires are. And so you see [audio issues] nature and I think that's embedded -- that's as I said is a key feature of ableism. And so [audio issues] when you don't understand how to deal with our own internalized ableism, read that into the text as well to say, well, of course he needs their supervision, he needs their help, because he doesn't know -- he doesn't know what he needs, he doesn't know what he wants. And so therefore it's their faith, which is also sort of a key feature of John 5, if I can tie that back in before I finish. Because one of the things that is often talked about with that text is that -- it appears as though because a man saying that he can't make his way to the pool that he lacks faith, and I remember preach [audio issues] this text not too long ago and saying that -- I think that's also a feature of ableism is to assume -- not only does ableism assume incompetence, but it assumes a lack of spirituality, because it's not expressed in the same way, hence why we sort of interpret scriptures differently. But if you [audio issues] about it and I [audio issues] they don't have faith that something is happening in that place, right, and so to say that he's been in that condition or he's been in that place for 38 years, there's something about his faith and his faith in whatever is happening in that place and in this community with other disabled people that allows them to continue to hang on to that, and I think that's something that we miss in that text [audio issues] not necessarily the healing but people there's a tremendous amount of faith that it takes to hang in there. And so rather than interpreting it as someone who is spiritually inept, I like to think of it as, man, this guy is actually a great example of Faith. He continues to pursue community against all odds -- when the outside world is saying hey, look, the goal is to be able-bodied, and I feel [audio issues] that can be reinterpreted to say -- the goal is to seek out community and to find a place where -- because they gathered there because they felt that's a place where they could all belong together. So I think that's just a couple of ways of reinterpreting those texts in ways that are are more helpful.

>> Ben: Yeah, I can say I've also preached on that text fairly recently, and the fact that -- also just a reiteration in the -- this narrative, a whole group of folks carry a paralytic man on a stretcher, and there's no room to get to Jesus. So what they do is they break down the roof and gently -- or messily, not gently, put him in front of Jesus. And I regularly reflect on -- wow, that person, like, in the midst of all the stigma has an exceptionally loving community that is surrounding them and willing to destroy property -- to to -- get this -- the help and support that this person may desire. So I really appreciate that. And yeah, there's also your points about aspiring towards a very particular type of identity of -- as Reverend Dr. Jennings -- Willie Jennings from Yale Divinity School says so often in euro-Christianity, there's an aspiration towards white self-sufficient masculinity, and disability often does away with that as even an option for those who may have other identities in that sense, and kind of unravels a lot of the ableism inherent in those interpretations of scripture. So I'm happy to pass it to you, Angela.

>> Angela: Thank you. This is Angela speaking. I think that in the emerging work of disability theology, so much of what y'all and all of these other amazing disabled scholars are bringing is reimagining texts as not so much a focus on cure, but a focus on restoring people to their community, healing by being in relationship. Dr. Kenny, I resonated with so much of your book. I really appreciate appreciate how you approach this topic, your body not being a prayer request, with honesty, sarcasm, and self-compassion. You speak a lot about the blessings of disability, how it teaches us interdependence and restores our betweenness, which is my favorite word in your book. I wonder, what is your favorite example -- we've mentioned a few already -- of prophetic disabled witness in the New Testament or in the church today?

>> Amy: This is Amy. Thank you Angela for those kind words. A story I really love is the parable that Jesus tells us in Luke 14, instructing folks to invite poor and disabled people to their banquets. And one of the guests tries to pull a fast one and immediately says, oh, but we're all blessed if we have -- have banquets. And Jesus corrects that and says, no, it's folks who invite poor and disabled folks to their banquet first. And generally, this parable is taken to be eschatology, or a picture of new creation, and yet we miss that disabled folks are invited without condition, cure, or condemnation. There's no talk of curing or fixing, there's no talk of what if this draws the wrong crowd or we're not stewarding tithe well because we don't have resources to make something accessible. We simply get an image of what new creation is like -- Jesus's image of what new creation is like. And disabled people are included so that my house may be filled. And when disabled folks and poor folks are invited first, there's enough for everyone. And I think this image is so meaningful to me, because disabled folks are mentioned at this great banquet, the accessible banquet, not as a form of pity or a precursor to change, but they are included to show who got God invites to the table. And that's an image that I have held dear -- when folks in my community have tried to pray me away. And it's also an image that I have received pushback on from folks, that "it's a metaphor," people are quick to assure me. And it's interesting what's a metaphor and what's literal when it comes to disability in the passage that Lamar was talking about just a minute ago in Mark 2, where folks are ripping off the roof. You know, somehow that's never taken to be that they literally dismantle a building that's inaccessible. So if we want to take something literally, let's take that -- that what if we raised the roof or tore down buildings that were not accessible, so that we could all get to Jesus? And this accessible banquet is really important to me because of -- not only how we are included at the table, but how there's enough for everyone when we are. Because I think that's so often the assumption that if we make things accessible, that that's somehow taking away from other folks. And that's just not what we witness in this passage.

>> Angela: Thank you so much. We're going to move now to some questions we have in the question and answer section. I invite you all who are here to continue submitting your questions if you have them. For you, Dr. Hardwick, we have a question from Payton, which I think will help us to think more about this idea of what is metaphor and what is read literally. Payton says, "I'm curious how you read the later interaction in John 5 between Jesus and the healed man from a perspective of dismantling ableism, particularly where Jesus encounters the healed man at the temple and tells him not to keep sinning or something worse may happen to him."

>> Lamar: Yeah, that's tough. I was afraid that was going to come up. [chuckles] And -- it's tough because I think that there's a -- a preeminent focus on that, which makes it -- at least in my experience which makes what some feel as a justification for continuing this dialogue about having this connection between disability and sin. So I'll just say this. For me, I think the way I -- the way I address that and the way that I try to reconcile that is to zoom out and look at other places where Jesus seems to address that. What seems to be historical, at least at that time, what seems to be an historical connection or thought of an historical connection between disability and sin. So of course John 9 would be one, where he says -- who sinned, this man or his parents? And Jesus says neither. But then also one that I've been wrestling with as of recently is not just John 9 but Mark 9, where Jesus talks about -- if your hand continues to sin, cut it off. If your eye -- you know the rhetoric there. But it seems to be that in both John 9 and Mark 9, Jesus having a conversation with an historical theological view of what the connection between disability and sin actually is. And in both cases, he seems to be trying to unravel this idea that those two things -- like there's a causality there, right? And so while there might be some correlation, I think -- he's sort of debunking society that it's causality. And so if you look at John 5 -- and I say that -- just let me back up -- I say that to say because we know all the source material for the gospels came from Mark, right? And so I take a big picture lens and think about, okay, so what does that say to us about this trajectory that Jesus is on, and is there a possibility that he's continually working through this historical thought -- that historical and theological thought for his followers that there's this connection between disability and sin. And so when he says, go and sin no more or something else worse might happen, I tend to place that in the bigger context of understanding where the source material came from, the gospels, but also understanding what Jesus seems to be trying to address in both Mark and -- Mark 9 and John 9, right, and say okay, maybe there's -- maybe there's some correlation, but I would much rather think that the trajectory is pointing us towards sort of unraveling the causation, right? And that leads me to the last point is where I would say that a lot of how we also perhaps may need to put this together, as far as trying to understand that, is to look at our relationship with the doctrine of original sin, right, and how much -- how much of that influences the way that we read those things. And even understanding what Jesus is saying about go and sin no more -- is this a correlation or is this a causation? And of course -- for those of us who may have a evangelical background, the doctrine of original seems to be very prominent thought. But there's other alternative ways of interpreting the fall. One being I would encourage people to look up original blessing, right? And the reason I say that -- and I talk about that at the end of my book -- is that original sin, particularly when it comes to disability and understanding the relationship between disability and sin -- it tends to be far less helpful than it is harmful, because it becomes -- as Dr. King said earlier, as a way of us not being accountable for making the adjustments and the accommodations and expressing the -- love that Jesus has, and his ultimate goal of placing disabled people in communities of support, which is to me the ultimate goal. And so it -- it's very complicated, but I think for me that's how I sort of try to reconcile that is I put it in the big picture of what did it seem like Jesus was actually trying to do in those places, where he debunks this idea that sin is a cause of disability.

>> Ben: Thank you so much for addressing that topic, Dr. Hardwick. That's something that I find I have to cover a lot of ground in in my sermons about disability, so I really appreciate that. We have a question from Elliot Barnhill who writes "the healing narratives in the gospels have been spoken of a lot in this webinar. How can disabled folks -- specifically those who do not expect to be healed, reconcile the problematic nature of a miracle focused on healing with the radical diversity of disability that Dr. Kenny identifies in the passage from Revelations? What types of meaning making can arise from that tension?

>> Amy: This is Amy -- I was waiting to hear Lamar's thoughts on this, because I would rather hear Lamar talk than myself, but I will share that I think there's a real difference between curing and healing, and I think that those are too often conflated when we talk about these narratives and when we interpret scripture. So curing is a physical process. It's individual, it's usually fairly rapid, and it concentrates on eliminating something, usually disease or disability of some kind. Healing is a sociocultural process. It focuses on restoring. It's restoring interpersonal, social, and spiritual dimensions. Healing is the work that is done in and with community. And I think so often we're conflating those, and I think that's why I really love John 9, because those are very distinct, that the curing actually produces more social problems for the person in that story. And I think it's also worth noting that the Greek word often used in scripture for healing is a word that means to make whole or to save. And so really just reframing what is curing, what is healing, and I think both of our books talk about that in different ways. So that's -- if you want to learn more about that, that might be a resource. But also, asking ourselves what bias and assumption we're bringing to the text, because I think that's so often included in our interpretations, whether we intend it to be or not.

>> Lamar: Yeah I would just piggyback -- one of the things I say in my previous book "Disability in Churches," I have a quote where I say that I don't think Jesus came to just bring healing to Earth. He came to bring Heaven to Earth, right? And so again, I think if there's -- a vast study of the healing narratives in the gospels -- a lot of that was done in the very early stages of -- stages of Jesus's Ministry. And it seems like the goal was always to restore community. And so, I think that's the primary lens by which I choose to interpret the healing narratives, that it's not just about, as Amy said, curing, but about wholeness, about restoring. But then also to understand that there are indigenous ways of thinking in those days that don't match the ways in which we particularly see things in the west, as Dr. Kenny so eloquently alluded to. And so I think that's also lost in translation because again -- particularly for those of us here in the west, like -- we've lost, there's no indigenous thought mapping onto our interpretations of those things, like what that mean for them, what was the thought process, how did they view persons with disabilities? You get a glimpse of that when you think about things like -- showing yourself to the priest so that you can be -- have a re-entry process back into the community, right? So the goal was always community, that seems to be the end stage. It wasn't just fix their physical body and then they go off on their own. There was a re-entry process to help them be reintegrated back into the community, which always seems to be the last stage of the quote unquote healing process. So for me that's the bigger question here is how do we make that the lens by which we interpret those things. And then lastly I'll say I like the parable of the weed and the tears. I know Jesus is talking about the -- he says the kingdom is like this. But what I tell people as someone who's autistic, my brain is a complicated system of wheat and weeds, and it looks the same on the surface, but beneath the surface there's a lot going on there, right? But -- if you read that parable, the master of the field says don't tear up the weeds because you might hurt the wheat. And what I tell people is is that what I'm -- the way I'm able to interpret that is that there's a harvest that God intends to get out of that situation. And the healing or the quote unquote separation of the two things that don't seem to go together actually puts the harvest in jeopardy, right? And so what I like to tell people is that God might not heal me because there's a intent understanding of the harvest that can actually come from this complicated life that I have to live, right? And he's committed to that harvest. And so I think that's another way to sort of interpret how there is a lot going on, and it's complicated often times beneath the surface. But God is -- intentional about preserving the harvest that is your life. And so sometimes the healing is not something that is the primary -- or I should say, not the healing -- the curing is not the primary concern, but that's also, as we put it up against the lens of community. So that's -- that's one way that I like to sort of look at it as well.

>> Ben: So our last question in our last five minutes comes from Andrew Ryder, and I think it's a great question to end on. To follow up on Dr. Hardwick's last answer, anti-ableism and anti-blackness call into question familiar theological ideas, particularly, though not exclusively, in Evangelical spaces. Could each of you speak to the ways that focusing on ableism can lead communities into new ways of seeing theology and/or moving from alternative theologies to practical anti-ableism in Christian communities?

>> Lamar: Well I'll just quickly say one of the things that I talk about in my last book is that I believe that disability theology should not be a novelty. It shouldn't be something that Christians study to try to understand which -- why bodies aren't well or why bodies don't work. But it's something that actually, when we study it, it becomes something that actually helps us to understand or engage further in the Christian doctrine of incarnation. And that is that we -- in Christian tradition we believe in a God who was born, a God who bleeds, a God who's buried, right? And so you start to see how God works through bodies, which is sort of the foundation of this idea of incarnation. But we can use that to expand our ideas and our theology about God, because we can understand how God works through bodies. And not just able bodies, but all bodies, right? Hence the disabled God. And I talk about that and so does Dr. Kenny. And I say that -- Jesus reverses death but retains disability, right? And that is an intentional choice, and that is how Jesus decides that he wants to eternally be identified. So you get this sense in which we're able to further our theological views by understanding the ways in which God chooses that body -- Jesus chooses that post-resurrection body, and it helps us to understand how God works through all bodies. And in that way, you also begin this trajectory of understanding how to work through anti-ableism in a very practical way, because now we're starting to include the experiences of atypical bodies. And our discussions about how to understand how God works and God's nature, intention, and character could be seen as working through the bodies of those who I say in my book -- as you talk about racism and ableism, there's a distinct class of what's considered quote unquote despised bodies, and that's the very body that Jesus chooses to work through as a way of identifying who God is post-resurrection. I think there's a lot of practical application that can come from that.

>> Amy: This is Amy. In addition to Dr Hardwick's comments, I think do an accessibility audit. Start small. Revise songs, liturgies, practices to be inclusive. Make sure that you are planning for and welcoming diverse ways of communicating, moving, interacting. So think about stim tools and sensory space and what words we're using too, and what practices and behaviors we are encouraging. And learn from the wisdom of disabled people. We are uniquely creative, because we live in a world that isn't built for our bodyminds. Everything from the electric toothbrush, to the snuggie, to the huddle, to texting, to touch screens, was created by and for disabled folks. Imagine what else we could create together in the church, and through the church, and in our lives, if we learned from the wisdom of disabled folks.

>> Ben: Wow. Y'all are so incredible. What a wonderful way to end this fantastic webinar. It's three o'clock, so we'll respect everybody's time and end it here. If y'all have any follow-up questions or want to learn more about disability in religious, spiritual, or faith traditions feel free to check out the faith inclusion and belonging section of the RespectAbility website, and a lot of practical tips can be found there in how to bring this incredible work to your faith community. So I want to thank again Dr. Kenny, and Dr. Hardwick, and Angela Molloy for their contributions today, and our ASL interpreter and CART captioner. Hope you all have a fantastic rest your week, and take care.