

## Know the Healing Touch of Jesus

13 February 2022

Reading: Luke 6:17-26

Loving God open the Scriptures to us in a fresh and exciting way.

In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen.

I was very touched by the musical tribute that Bob, one of our musical directors, had organized for his grandad, Stewart. Stewart had died in England but his family over here, unable to get to his funeral, organized a musical tribute. It included wonderful soul stirring music. What a lovely idea. I was really touched. I think everyone there was really touched.

Notice that word: touched.

We find Jesus in our Gospel on a level place, with a great crowd from all about. In verse 19 we read, "and all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them." To be touched by Jesus was to know the power of God's healing presence. We, the modern disciples of Jesus, casually hear about Jesus touching people and their touching him without catching its full impact.

We need to put on the mindset of a first century Jew, to understand.

A man was never to touch a child, or a woman in public. They were not to touch a sick person and certainly never a dead person. Gentiles, non-Jews, were never even to be spoken to, let alone touched and if you saw a leper you kept right away.

Nowhere is the mind-set of the Jew more obvious than in the temple. The temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world, and people came from the Mediterranean world and Asia just to see it. Access to God was limited. There was a courtyard for the Gentiles, from which they could enter no further. There was another courtyard for Jewish women, and they could enter no further after that. There was one for men, but if they were handicapped, they could go no further. Only a circumcised, physically perfect man from the right tribe could become a priest, and these people could only go into the Holy of Holies in the very heart of the temple on one day in the year.

Jesus' entire public ministry overturned this system of limited access to God. In his person he redrew the map of access to God by choosing to talk to, touch, and heal Gentiles, both men and women; women with a flow of blood or accused of adultery; lepers, the dead, and those who had touched the dead; and people with any number of physical and mental defects. He even blessed children by touching them. If the temple codes said that a person was unclean, Jesus welcomed him or her as a matter of policy and touched them. At his death the temple curtain was torn in two, symbolizing that this limited access to God is gone forever.

It is into this context that we need to understand Jesus' touch in the Gospel.

Some of you might be aware of the groundbreaking work of Dr Gary Chapman. Through his longtime work as a marriage counselor, he discovered that we all give and receive love in different ways. He has identified five ways: words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch.

Discovering our primary way of expressing love can be very helpful, especially in marriage. If one partner is hanging out for an encouraging word while the other is busy buying gifts to show love, they can be literally talking past each other.

I think physical touch must be my love language. Let me give you an example. Some 40 years ago this month my father died. Preparing for this sermon I started to think about those that comforted me. Forty years later, I can't remember the words of one card that was sent to me, although lots were. I can't remember one thing someone said to me in comfort, although lots of things were said. I can't remember one prayer, one song or one sermon, although lots were shared, but I can tell you who hugged me, who held my hand, who put their arm around me.

Touch has a way of powerfully reaching us, and even of healing. Of course, it can do the other things too if we aren't careful. But, used well, touch has the power to heal.

One poet put it like this:

Tis THE HUMAN TOUCH in this world that counts,  
The touch of your hand and mine,  
Which means far more to the fainting heart  
Than shelter and bread and wine;  
For shelter is gone when the night is o'er,  
And bread lasts only a day,  
But the touch of the hand and the sound of the voice  
Sing on in the soul always.

The good news is that Jesus' healing touch is still available to us today, right here. In a few moments we will be invited, as we are every week, to come and receive the touch of Jesus in a very special way. We call it Eucharist. We believe that Jesus comes in the bread and is one with us. He touches us with his very self. He becomes one with us and we with him in the sacrament. This is the ultimate of healing touches. It reminds us that he died and rose again for us, that he is alive and with us today. Even if we don't have someone close to us to give us safe touch. Even if COVID has made us so careful about how we touch, Jesus still comes and heals us with his very self.

When we come for communion today, we are like that first crowd so long ago, we seek to be touched by Jesus.

A very deep thing happens when we receive Jesus at communion, we become what we eat, we become the body of Christ. We become the body of Christ in the world in order that our touch might be healing for others. We need to be so careful about how we touch others, a touch that is both welcome and healing.

“And all in the crowd were trying to touch Jesus, for power came out from him and healed all of them.”