

Touch me

Luke 24:36-48

Have you noticed there are two kinds of beach walkers? Those who walk above the tide line and those who walk just on the water's edge and let the waves wash over their feet.

It made me think. I believe there may be two types of church goers. Those who want to be here but too afraid to be touched by God and those who want the words to wash over their souls.

Last week, your reading was doubting Thomas. He could not believe until he touched the wounds. And in today's reading Jesus encourages them 'touch me and see. Does a ghost have flesh and bones?'

The thing we've missed the most about COVID is touch. I long to put my arms around my friends.

The chaplain in me knows how important touch is. When we pray with someone, to put a hand on their shoulder is to feel God's touch. You feel them physically relax into the warmth. To hold their hand as they lay dying is a gentle lifeline saving them from the dark. Jesus is not about darkness but about light. He is not about death but about life.

Touch is a link. A ladder. A doorway.

More importantly, this passage could be a gateway to a whole new meaning. Jesus says, 'have you anything here to eat?' and they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. When we take part in communion – we eat in each other's presence.

This is my body broken for you – and we take it and eat it. Ingest it and it becomes part of us. Union is the root-word for communion. We are taking it in – we are allowing the whole idea to be part of us.

It is the act that is the commitment not necessarily, the elements. It is the willingness to ingest and let something become part of us and us become part of something else. Jesus made that commitment. We do too. When Jesus met them on the road to Emmaus, he came as a stranger. They didn't recognise him...until he broke the bread.

When you walk on the water's edge, the surf sends up puffs of warm air and minerals that tingle your face. You inhale the bounty of the sea. You are aware of the dancing particles. Just 2 metres away, you can't smell or feel the sparkle. Ironically, the sand is firmer at the water's edge so those who choose to walk above the water line have a harder time of it.

We know from medical research that those with faith, any faith, have less severe pain and shorter recovery periods.

Three weeks after Easter, we are still preaching on the resurrection. How do we grapple with this mystery? Who is the resurrected Jesus? The Easter event is an inscrutable experience in the life of the church. It is mysterious and has different realities for different people.

The appearance stories describe 'the various initiatives Jesus takes to confront his followers' scepticism in such a way as to pique our interest and remind us that these theological questions are not peculiarly ours'.¹

In other words, so many of us are doubting Thomas. We shouldn't feel bad. Questions about 'what *does* the resurrection mean?', linger every year. And every year, preachers across the world struggle to explain the mystery of God and the meaning of these events.

Mary Luti tells a story about a preacher preaching away, with all the confidence and skill of a veteran minister, when suddenly she stopped, almost in mid-sentence, and after a long and uncomfortable pause, said quietly, 'I have not idea what I'm talking about.'

She's right. How am I to know God's mind?

In her story, a voice from the back of the room proclaimed. 'Truth at last!!'

We can take two things away from Luke's reading. The first is don't be too hasty to use this 'reading as proof of a bodily resurrection - remembering in Luke's earlier story neither Mary in the tomb nor the folks on the road recognised Jesus. He appeared as a stranger. To quote Brueggemann et al again, all it proves is 'the two stories indicate that Jesus' presence is mysterious but real. It eludes human perception, and yet is no human fabrication.'

¹ *Texts for preaching*, Brueggemann, Cousar et al p, 294
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And the second is that the narrative is clear that the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection comes only from the study of the scripture. No historical 'proof' can convince anyone that in the final analysis, death and resurrection are the way God's promises are fulfilled.

For Luke – and many of us, the cross and the empty tomb are no more than astonishing stories ...

That is - until you put them into the larger Biblical framework as a continuing story of God's purpose and plan. Understanding lays in what led up to it, and after, and in what it signifies. It is taken as a whole in scripture, just as Jesus presents in a whole body; arms and legs, mouth and innards:

Not a floating head or ghost; apparition or zombie. Note each of those are missing something. Jesus is whole.

The next part of Luke Gospel makes it abundantly clear what they are supposed to do in mission and that's another sermon altogether

So let's go back to simple. 'Touch me', he says. Metaphorically teaching us to say 'touch me, Lord' – I am inviting you to be real.

I know the story and now I am allowing it to be ingested in me.

I pray: The mystery is never available to me until I feel it. Lord, let me feel it and in doing so may I once again, unite my being in yours. Touch me Lord. I am not afraid. Amen