

Just the Right Touch

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Easter / Touch; Incarnation; Resurrection / Acts 4:32–35; Psalm 148; 1 John 1:1–2:2; John 20:19–31

- › Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!
- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our Resurrected King. Amen.

Last we heard the message to Return and See, to Come and See the Lord Jesus Christ Resurrected from the dead and then to go and tell that message. Today we are invited to touch our Living Lord.

If you've ever been in a delivery room either giving birth to your children or standing beside your wife, you'll understand touch. After delivery assuming that mom and baby are both healthy, the newly born child is placed into the loving arms of his or her mother. The love and warmth of the mother and child is there. The tiny baby curls his or her tiny fingers around the mother's index finger. There is something about the right touch. It communicates, "I love you." It communicates a sense of closeness, assurance, comfort, warmth, and happiness. Touch tells you that the other person is alive, real, there—and so are you.

We need just the right touch, to touch, and be touched in just the right way.

Research shows that children who grow up without much touch—abandoned, left alone for much of the time—grew at a slower rate, were sicker, had more trouble socially, and displayed more anger and depressed emotions.

It doesn't stop after you grow up. When you meet that special someone, you want to hold hands, put your arms around each other, and sit close. Touch is a way to show someone you love them. We just need the right touch, to touch, and be touched in just the right way. The right kind of touch says love, assurance, closeness, comfort, and happiness. Touch says the other person is there...alive, real—and so are you.

We also need the right touch, to touch, and be touched in just the right way by God. And we are. The Church has a special word to describe when God could touch and be touched. Incarnation. God came to earth and took on human flesh and blood. When the Virgin Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, she gave birth to Jesus, fully divine, but also fully human. Jesus was someone she could touch. Yes, when Mary touched Jesus, tapped his nose, squeezed his cheek, and let him curl his tiny finger around her index finger, she was touching God and He was touching her. God became flesh and dwelt among us. People saw him. They heard him. They touched him. Incarnation—because we need to be touched in just the right way, not just by each other, but especially by God.

Remember how the Good Lord, our Savior Jesus touched the Children as He blessed them. He made mud and placed it on the eyes of the man born blind in order that He may experience the glory of God. Remember the scene on the packed road as Jesus is headed to heal Jairus' daughter when the woman touches his cloak. Then, we see Jesus touch again when He gets on his hands and knees and washes his disciples feet on the night when he was betrayed, on the night when he instituted the Sacrament of the Altar. Jesus' ministry was full of touch.

We have a God who became flesh and dwelt among us to touch and be touched in just the right way. John says people could see Jesus, listen to Him, and touch Him with their hands: Jesus is God incarnate, and His touch says love, closeness, warmth, assurance, and joy. His touch says He is alive (Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!), real, and there—and so are we.

You probably know that leprosy was a devastating disease in biblical times. While it encompasses a variety of skin diseases, leprosy also destroys the nerve endings so you can't feel anything. You lose the sense of touch. Even worse, you were banished from the community. It was very much a contagious disease. No one could touch you or even come near you. I am sure that the distance was even greater than six feet. You became untouchable and lost the love and warmth, the closeness and joy that came with touch. Were you still alive and real? It didn't seem so.

It still happens today - this loss of touch and being touched. Now you and I have experienced this over the last year. If you've had Covid or were exposed you were asked to quarantine and isolate. There are countless stories of people who struggled with this very problem. The lack of touch. I am convinced that this is one of the reasons why there is a much high depression rate today...because of the lack of touch...even the handshake, the hug, the pat on the back. Does it feel like you are alive and real? At points...it doesn't seem so.

Even before Covid and after Covid...it still happens and will happen - the loss of touch and being touched. An abandoned child. A child left alone for hours on end. A child who isn't held or doesn't have a lap to sit on while listening to a book. A marriage gone bad. No touches of love. No secret hand squeezes. No caress of the cheek or big old bear hug.

But the most devastating loss of touch in this life is death. Sometimes families will stay for quite sometime after their loved one has died, before the funeral director comes and picks up the body. I've sat with people as they've sat beside their now deceased loved one, sometimes for hours.

I remember my grandmother's face. In fact her picture just came up on my Facebook memories a couple days ago. It's been nine years since she's been gone. I remember seeing her body in the funeral home before she was cremated. I could touch her hand, but it was cold, there was no life in it. It was so very difficult. There are times I close my eyes and I can see her face, her smile, and hear her voice, but I can't touch her.

Death is a pretty devastating loss of touch, but there is even a more horrific loss of touch and that is when we can no longer touch God or he no longer touches us in just the right way. We call that hell. Sure, the endless fires sound bad, but the loss of touch, the total separation from God, means no love, warmth, closeness, assurance, and joy. No right touch. What a frightening eternity that would be.

So God becomes incarnate for you. He comes flesh and blood for you. And His blood purifies us from everything that would keep us from touching Him now and forever. On the cross, Jesus takes on this most devastating loss of touch.

He cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus no longer touches His Father in heaven. His Father is no longer touching him.

Devastating. Frightening. Horrific. But Jesus is taking death and hell at their worst, the loss of touch with God, so that we could touch and be touched by God forever.

Then He rises from the dead. We say that because He lives, we, too, shall live. We also can say that we touch because He touches.

Remember Thomas, doubting Thomas, one of the main characters in our Gospel for today. He wasn't there when Jesus first appeared risen from the dead. He wouldn't believe unless he touched Jesus. Thomas tells them:

English Standard Version Chapter 20

Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

A week later, that second Sunday of Easter, Thomas, he is with the rest of the disciples. Jesus appears. He speaks to Thomas and says:

English Standard Version Chapter 20

Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

Just the right touch, as Thomas says, “My Lord and My GOd.”

We, too, need to touch and be touched by Jesus in just the right way. One of my professors from Seminary recalls a story from when he was a young boy: He says, “When I was a young boy, I remember seeing a statue of Jesus. He wore flowing robes, had long hair and a beard, and his hands were lifted up with two nailholes. The holes were dark, perhaps even blood red. I was afraid to touch the statue. Now I realize I need to touch and be touched for my faith to grow and stay healthy.” So do I. When does that happen?

It happens in our Baptism...the sign of Holy Cross is made on our foreheads and our hearts. The water touches our head and rolls down the cheek. Jesus is there. Just as he welcomed little children, he is blessing anyone who comes to

Him in that refreshing water. At the baptismal font, we touch and have been touched by Jesus in just the right way.

It happens at the altar. Here we see and touch Jesus once again. He promised to be in that piece of bread, that sip of wine. His body; his blood. Not a cold statue, but the real, living Jesus. Right there. Flesh and blood. Among us. Touching us. Us touching Jesus. In that Sacrament, Jesus is close, saying, “I love you.” He is giving assurance, comfort and joy as He purifies us from all sin. He is real, present, and alive—and so are we when we touch that bread and wine, that body and blood. And just touch but taste and eat.

It’s been said that since Jesus isn’t here in tangible form as he was for Thomas; we are his hands, fingers, and arms. Pre-Covid we saw this touch in very real ways. I would stand by and shake the hands of those who come in and then after. You would see others shaking hands. I grew up in a church where at the beginning of the service we shared God’s peace. You would see people moving around, shaking hands and even sharing hugs. After the service there is more handshaking. These days aren’t that far from returning, in my opinion. The hands and arms of Jesus are with us when we give the hug to someone facing a medical crisis or even to the grieving widow, parent, child. We could call that mutual consolation of the brothers and sisters. In a way, that’s Jesus touching us through his Church.

We need just the right touch, to be touched in just the right way by Jesus. We have learned over the last year that we need the greetings and the handshakes...at least the fit bumps, the hugs and the holds. We need the blessings and the water. We need the bread and the wine...frequently. We need to touch and be touched by Jesus now in this life and in the life to come, when we see Jesus face-to-face and can physically touch him just like Thomas.

We will! One day, we, too, will have the joy and wonder of touching Jesus, just as Thomas did, and the rest of the Apostles. His resurrection is our hope is that touch and being touched will not end at the grave, but will be ours once again on the Last Day and for eternity .

The leper, the covid-depressed, the abandoned child, the brokenhearted, the grieving parents, spouse, child, the son or grandson who remembers—we need just the right touch, to be touched in just the right way. Jesus' incredible gift to us is that we are, and we will.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!
- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Resurrected Lord. A,em/