

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, June 30th, 2024, Combined Service
2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, Psalm 130, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

The way forward and the value of touch. The value of touch for healing and in our everyday lives as well. It was Ann Landers who said we need eight hugs a day for maintenance 12 or more for growth, if I remember correctly. So much for that during COVID.

This is important that's why I borrowed from the Right Reverend Michael Pollesel, the retired Bishop of Uruguay when he was the Incumbent of St. Thomas, Belleville, the prayer:

I lay my hands upon you in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, beseeching him to uphold you and fill you with his grace, that you may know the healing power of his love. *Amen.*

I use it in hospitals and with the sick and at that time I get the family and loved ones to touch the person as well.

With the Naskapi in northern Quebec, I used it in two ways, at an evening service, after having the prayer translated. Those who wanted this prayer and laying on of hands, all would participate both in receiving the prayer and in helping others as well.

But I started the service with Intercessions and who would be prayed for. People and groups who were not in the church, someone there would stand in for the group as a proxy and the group or people would be prayed for with the laying on of hands.

And how many remember we did this as well as a Sunday night service?

Then the challenge coming into the presence of Jesus it's not easy, and the consequences or at least the risk. Jairus, religious leader and the woman sick, bleeding for 12 years. Each coming from the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Both risking rejection and ridicule.

Mark does not discuss the cost to Jairus in asking Jesus to heal his daughter, but we hear in John about Nicodemus, in a similar position coming to Jesus only in the dark of night. Mark goes into some detail about the risk taken but the woman to just touch the hem of his cloak. To touch in secret. It works out for her, but the risk was there at the beginning.

But this is not always easy. At a clergy conference a few years ago, (not the most recent, but the one just before covid began.) I was sitting with a colleague who had been a classmate. At the eucharist which was very moving after the Bishop's sermon, at the peace I turned and gave my colleague a hug. He returned the hug, but then mentioned his discomfort with hugging. I immediately apologized.

This incident came back to me as I was preparing this sermon, but I also remembered something else about my classmate. There was a blind woman who was a friend of his who kept bumping into him because although she could avoid other people and not

bump into them because she felt their energy before, she got to them, she did not feel his energy until she got too close to him to avoid bumping into him.

And I cannot help wondering if the two are connected.

I am a little more cautious about hugs and handshakes coming out of COVID for myself, but otherwise not an issue.

But it got me thinking, I am not comfortable with someone coming up and standing behind me when I am sitting in a chair or with my feet up. Once I know they are there, it may not be a problem.

And Corinthians makes me think there is another kind of touch as well. Touch without actually touching. I'm reminded of Jesus asking Peter to feed his sheep three times. And the three times represent the three different ways of feeding.

Physically, providing food and other physical needs.

Emotionally and intellectually.

And spiritually.

And I also can't help thinking of the three gifts given to Jesus and to us at Epiphany. Gold signifies role gathering the kin together.

Frankincense which signifies that we are spiritual beings. We are created to be spiritual beings in relationship with God not something foreign that we put on outside of ourselves.

And myrrh which reminds us of the reality of fulfilling the first two comes with an element of sacrifice. That's touching others in different ways.

And the question: can you say anything about yourself in a phrase or word which doesn't connect you to God or any other part of God's creation, anyone else? I don't believe it is possible. We are connected, for our benefit and value and for all we come into contact with.

I cannot help thinking of the irony of this passage today. I mentioned the challenge of coming into the presence of Jesus today, and last night the disciples waking Jesus up in the back of the boat during the storm. There is a challenge and a benefit, but I believe the benefit outweighs the challenges, and sometimes the two are connected.

The reality is that none are not restricted from coming into his presence, but that all can come, all are welcome.

Amen

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet
walk with you on the road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands
stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart
open your hearts to love.

May you see the face of Christ in ev'ryone you meet,

And may ev'ryone you meet see the face of Christ in you. Amen.