

April 11, 2010
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2nd Sunday After Easter

Out of Touch

With all the texting, tweeting, and emailing we do today...with all of the information we have at our finger tips, I wonder if we aren't becoming a little out of touch. Out of touch with our bodies as we gulp down energy drinks and fast food, as we obsess over diets and workout regimens. Out of touch with the earth as we read articles and listen to podcasts about global warming from the comfort of air conditioned homes and coffee shops. Out of touch with our communities, our friends, our families as we are sucked in to our culture's wireless, "on the go" pace. And there are still even those moments that we may feel out of touch with our faith. Out of touch with God.

Thomas was out of touch. He wasn't with the other disciples when Christ made his first post-resurrection appearance to them. And when he heard their ecstatic witness, "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas didn't believe them. Earlier in John's Gospel, Thomas was the first of the disciples to proclaim his naïve willingness to follow Jesus to death. Thomas openly confessed his own lack of understanding in Jesus teaching. And today...well...Thomas seems even more out of touch with his community and his faith, boldly stating that he will not believe that Christ is risen until he experiences it for himself...through touch.

Our senses of sight, sound, smell and taste are each located around a unique bodily organ. But touch...touch is something that we experience throughout our entire bodies, through our skin. Our cheeks and noses, our toes and our feet...our hands and our sides. It almost seems as though our bodies are built with this primary sensory experience in mind. A professor of psychology at UC-Berkeley points out that TOUCH is the first language we learn as newborns. Studies at DePauw University in Indiana have revealed that even a person who is blindfolded can interpret emotions such as gratitude, disgust and love through physical contact. There is even Touch Research Institute that studies describes the benefits massage therapy...improving immune function, promoting weight gain in premature infants, reducing stress and pain, alleviating symptoms of depression, enhancing attentiveness. Clearly, touch is important.

In today's world, we like to think that keeping in touch means picking up the phone, posting a comment on someone's Facebook wall, or sending text messages and emails with birthday or holiday greetings. We have phones, cameras and now computers like Apple's iPad that respond to the touch of a finger. As we create new means of staying in virtual contact with others, we grow comfortable with distances. Physical and geographical distances. Emotional distances. Spiritual distances. In seeking to span these divides with technology, we accept a loss of physical experiences, of physical contact. We lose touch.

Thomas's request to touch Jesus' hands and side is often understood to be a great statement of doubt in God, a miraculously loving God who had performed countless miracles and dispersed teachings to the world through Christ. But I wonder if Thomas's doubt doesn't echo our own deep need for physical contact...our desire to get back in touch with our own lives, with our families, with the earth, with God. To experience touch that dispels doubt and creates faith. Touch that causes us believe and trust in the promise that God has made to all of creation. God's promise to come to us, to cross the distance of space and time.

Just as Christ appeared before the disciples and later before Thomas, God DOES come to us and God enables to keep in touch through worship. As we dip our hands in the font...as we are sprinkled with drops of baptismal water, God keeps us in touch with who we are, with our identity as children of God, with the waters that have coursed this earth since the time of creation. At the passing of the peace, as we shake hands, as we bow, or exchange an embrace, God keeps us in touch with each other in a way that phone calls, texting and emails can't. In a few moments, we will be gathered around the table, we will reach out, we will feel a piece of bread placed our expectant hands. Through this meal, God keeps us in touch with our deep need for the mercy and love. Through experiencing Christ, through touching Christ, God keeps in touch with us. Touch that creates and strengthens our faith. Touch that joins us with the community of saints across the distances of space and time.

I wonder if this season of Easter poses an opportunity...maybe even a challenge to us to “keep in touch” – physically, emotionally, spiritually. A challenge to seek out, to demand, to revel in those experiences with our friends and family. Experiences with the earth and nature. Experiences with the risen Christ. Maybe it’s taking a walk down by the lakeshore or striking up a conversation with the cashier at the grocery store or sharing a simple meal. These seemingly small acts and gestures, keep us in touch, creating and strengthening our relationships, our world and our faith.