

The Three Days 2010
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Maundy Thursday
SKIN CARE

It seems simple. Love is more than words. We show care and reverence for another by our actions. And often with physical contact.

One writer says: “Without touch, a baby dies, the human heart aches, and the soul withers.” (Phyllis K. Davis). Massage therapists know this. To be deprived of touch can result in loneliness and restlessness, sometimes even drug abuse, promiscuity, workaholism or compulsive overeating.

Yet a number of taboos have made us a touch-starved nation. We sensationalize and sexualize *skin* yet we know all too well the dangers of inappropriate touch that is abusive and harmful, often leaving deep emotional scars. News of scandals and cover-ups in the Roman church seem to never end. Teachers, clergy and other professionals wonder if you can ever touch someone anymore. From the very public stories of John Edwards, Tiger Woods and Sandra Bullock, skin contact is sometimes a source of deep betrayal.

We begin the Three Days not with profound theological truths. But with Jesus bending low to wash the feet of his disciples. There is skin contact. With tenderness Jesus touches and washes their dirty, calloused feet. It is your deeds of love that will mark you as my disciples.

Yes, they and we, are called to wash the feet of one another. To embody this radical kind of *skin care*. But before we get too overly eager to go out and save the world, we get our feet washed. And maybe that is hardest of all. To be touched by another. To be touched by Jesus.

It’s more blessed to give than to receive, right? Maybe that’s why we agree with thick-skinned Peter’s response: Lord, you will never wash my feet! Yet before we can be about the task of loving and serving, we receive.

Hands are laid on our heads for forgiveness and a new beginning. Feet are washed, sometimes by a stranger, reminding us that we are loveable as we are. That we are created in the divine image, body and soul. And finally, bread in our hands, body of Christ, for our bodies, for this body.

Our skin is our largest and least-known organ. It makes up a sixth of our body weight. No one can survive without it; whereas, we can live without eyes or ears. And compared with other organs, skin is turned both inward and outward. We can communicate what is happening inside us outwards. And what happens outwards can be experienced inwards.

Touch changes us. Touch transforms us. Touch heals us.

The ritual of footwashing is a profound reminder of our baptismal call. As a community and as a church, we meet Christ in the skin—in the bodies--of others. Most especially those with broken bodies, aging bodies, frail bodies, abused bodies, ill bodies, differently-abled bodies. Maybe we will never know what it feels like to live in their skin, but we have much to learn, to receive, from them.

In a culture that glamorizes skin, yet is hungry to be touched, in this place we practice with our bodies, with our skin, learning reverence for one another, that in our lives we will extend such compassionate care to the poor and needy, to the earth and all living things. And yes, to our skin, to our flesh as well.

So as we enter the great Three Days, Jesus stoops to become our servant, that we, too, may be about the ministry of *skin care*.

Good Friday

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

What just happened? That's what the participants wondered.

In a workshop called "Embodied Holiness," a group of pastors and lay people studied and discussed the Beatitudes, the sayings of Jesus that begin "Blessed are the" The leader wanted to do more than merely talk about them. So she formed groups of five to six and asked each group to take one of the Beatitudes, and arrange the group members to form a tableau of it. Without words.

Understandably, there was great resistance among the participants. I would have probably been one of the folks that would have headed straight toward the door for a stretch or coffee break.

The results were quite stunning, though. The last group had "Blessed are those who mourn." It was all women. A woman had earlier offered to just lie dead on the ground so she didn't have to do anything. Another woman cradled the first woman's head in her lap. Two others knelt beside her and two others stood over them until they made a sort of cathedral over the dead woman's body. The group of women simply held the pose. It was full of love and sorrow.

And then a sob rose right out of the midst of them. No one could tell if it had been planned or if it was real. Everyone was still as a grave. Then the body of the one on the floor began to heave. The other women bent over her. Another began to weep. And still another let out a small yelp until the whole tableau was heaving over the body of the dead woman who had come back to life.

What just happened, everyone wondered. What did it mean? Who knows? But the leader knew that God was there, in the flesh, and that no one who saw it will ever forget it.¹

In the years following Jesus' death, the faithful began to wonder and question: what happened? What does this death mean? Each gospel writer tells the story with a particular theological lens. Sometimes Jesus' dies abandoned and alone, as in Matthew and Mark. The passion story we heard on Sunday is radically different from John's version that we heard tonight. In John, it as if Jesus reigns from the cross. His death is not defeat, but victory. From the cross streams healing, new life and resurrection. *There in God's garden stands the tree of wisdom. Tree of compassion. Tree of all beauty.* No wonder the mood of the hymns and liturgy tonight is quite different from last Sunday.

What happened on Good Friday? And what does it mean? For centuries composers, poets, theologians, artists, writers and preachers have tried to express the meaning of this death. In a million different ways. With words and without.

When we look back on the most painful, difficult or sorrowful time in our lives, there are often not words. What happened, we ask ourselves. We would have never chosen that suffering, but deep in our very being, we know that God was there. In our flesh. In our anguish, loss and tears.

So tonight we offer reverence to the cross. We can't quite put into words why this act of worship means so much to us. We use our bodies. There are no words. It's about Jesus and his death. But it's also about our deepest losses. And the vast suffering in our world.

Someone told me that the first time he saw people come forward to offer reverence to the cross on Good Friday he wept. What happened? He couldn't put it into words.

Maybe all we can hope is that God will be here tonight, in our flesh. And that somehow, the cross will be to us, healing and resurrection.

¹Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*, pp. 48-51.

Easter Vigil

H2O

H2O. Said simply: one molecule of water = two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.

H2O. Water. It covers seventy percent of the earth's surface. It makes up about sixty percent of our body.

In the novel, *Life of Pi*, it's called "liquid life."

The name of a young, emerging congregation in Orlando is this: H2O Church.

Water figured prominently in the readings tonight. Spiritually speaking, we thirst for God. We long for refreshment. There's nothing like a good bath to make you clean and tingly all over.

The writer Anne Lamott says of Christians and water:

Most of what we do in worldly life is geared toward staying dry, looking good, not going under. But in baptism, in lakes and rain and tanks and fonts, you agree to do something that's a little sloppy because at the same time it's also holy, and absurd. It's about surrender, giving in to all those things we can't control; it's a willingness to let go of balance and decorum and get drenched...being willing to have your makeup wash off, your eyes tear up, your nose start to run...

The hope is that when you go under and you come out, maybe a little disoriented, you haven't dragged the old day along behind you. The hope, the belief, is that a new day is upon you now.... (Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*)

And so now, we go to the water. We bring Felisa, to pour grace and mercy over her. To immerse her in the gifts and the call of this community. To let the new life of Easter flow in this place.

We too come, eager to let the drops of water call us from death, back to life, like rain falling on dry earth.

God promises to be among us as we gather at the river, at the font, at the pool. O blessed spring. O flowing fountain. O cleansing flood. O living water. O holy H2O. Show us Christ risen in this place, in this body, in Felisa. Rain down your Spirit on us. Our very flesh thirsts for you.