

Sunday, April 1:1-19, Luke 8:43-48, Luke 24:36-38

### Are you Afraid to Touch the Risen Christ?

Don't touch that. Wash your hands. The shopping cart has been sanitized for your protection. Here are your items- I'll place them into the trunk. All items are left on the counter for you to pick up. Aren't you tired of hearing these statements shared again and again because of covid19? We are becoming 'covid19/ pandemic fatigued! That is we are tired of the lockdown, emergency measures and the yo-yoing of businesses open or not open. We are also feeling many emotions- joy when we are walking down the street and see somebody's eyes that you might know. Frustrated because we see blossoms on trees and they are so pretty in the sunshine. But of course we cannot smell them with our noses covered. And when was the last time you shook hands, banged elbows or were hugged?

Our first reading from Luke 8 is actually a story within a story. Jesus has heard that Jairus' only child a daughter of 12 is dying. This man Jairus is a synagogue leader and he falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to come to his house to bring healing. So Jesus hearing the story starts moving along with the crowd who has heard about what Jesus has done in the past. They are walking in the street and the crowd is growing larger as they make their way to Jairus' house. However, what occurs in the street is what we see as in inner story. As Jesus walks, someone, a stranger a woman who had been suffering for 12 years presses in toward Jesus and believing that he could heal her, she touches his cloaks. Ironically, Jesus feels something and stops walking. He turns to the crowd and asks, "who touched me?" No one owned up to it. Peter tries to soften the problem, Jesus, we didn't see who touched you. But I know someone did because I notice that power had gone out from me.

Then the woman realized that she could not remain hidden came forward and knelt at Jesus' feet. She told Jesus and the crowd listening, what had happened and how when she touched Jesus' cloak, she was healed. Jesus acknowledges her stating, "Daughter, your faith as made you well. go in peace." But what had occurred here? A woman bleeding for 12 years, had gone everywhere to get some help and was now financially broke and still suffering with the weakness of lack of blood. A woman at that time was not to be on the streets in this condition as she was deemed impure. In fact, there would even be question as to why she is outside of her home in the first place. She was not fit to be in a crowd as she bled uncontrollably. But this woman knows about Jesus and probably heard through the community that he was making his way to help Jairus' daughter. When she heard the crowd she believed that just simply touching Jesus he could be healed. She was not afraid to touch him, but probably frightened to face the consequences.

She needed to touch Jesus. Often we too need to be touched. As humans we know that being held, hug, touched is vital. Studies of premature or newborn babies or those left for adoption need the human touch to know that they are not alone. IT is one of our senses that

calls us to be human yet we are in a crisis right now that does not allow us to touch. So what are we to do?

Even Jesus needed to be touched. Our second reading is Luke's version of Jesus appearing to his disciples for the first time. He tells them, "Peace be with you." But they are afraid startled and terrified. Jesus tells them to look at him- hands and feet. See me. Touch me. The disciples were overjoyed in their disbelief. They held him, they touched him and they saw him as their friend, teacher and now risen Christ. Jesus moved to practical matters- I'm hungry. Anything to eat? So they served him broiled fish. While eating Jesus 'opened their minds to understand the scriptures and he reminded them of his purpose as the Son of God, Christ and Messiah. And this story teaches us as well. Jesus knew that when the disciples would see him as alive, they would need to touch him. But he too needed this- touch. Yes, he was Jesus but he was also living a human life up to the time of his death. He was an infant, child, youth and grew to be a man. He knew what it was like to be held and embraced by his mother and his closest friends. And in order for them to believe he was alive, they touched him.

The question we have today is simply this "Are we afraid to touch the Risen Christ?"

With all the restrictions we have due to the pandemic touching is prohibited in many places unless you use hand sanitizer over and over again. Whether you move from one area of a store to another, going in or going out of a place or two, and even whether you are holding on to a shopping cart, everything is being cleaned because of our need to touch what we buy or look at.

Yet when we think of Jesus, crucified, dead and buried this was a real event in Jerusalem during the time of the Passover about 2000 years ago. Close friends looked after his body and prepared for burial in the usual traditions. On the third day, it was Mary who had gone to the tomb but found it open and empty. Seeing the gardener and not knowing it to be Jesus she asked where the body of her teacher was. But when Mary heard him say her name, she knew who it was and she wanted to touch him right away. She wanted to hold him and embrace him. But Jesus just told her to go and tell the others. She needed to touch him.

Our reading from Acts 3 takes place after Jesus has ascended into heaven and Peter and John are at the temple one afternoon. A group of people were carrying a man lame from birth into the temple where he could lay and ask for support. This man asked Peter and John for alms or money as well. But Peter tells him, I don't have any silver or gold, but what I can do is this— he states, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." The man stood up and was strong on his feet. He jumped and walked and he went into the temple with them praising God. So what had occurred? In Jesus name, the man was healed. The woman who was in the crowd was healed by touching his cloak, and Jesus' disciples touched Jesus and for sure who he was.

But we who come to know Jesus cannot physically touch him. Much like not being able to embrace our friends and acquaintances at this time. But there is still feeling. There is emotions and this is not what we are asked to stop doing. We cannot touch but we can feel.

Are we afraid to feel and experience the Risen Christ? By faith we believe that Jesus rose from death and ascended into heaven. Yet his Spirit is with us and Jesus is real. Because we can feel the Spirit of God move in our hearts, we know that Jesus is within us. But are we truly understanding our what Jesus' death and resurrection causes to feel and experience?

Sometimes we wonder what is real and what is true. I can tell you about gravity. It is a theory based upon laws of nature. If you don't properly support a ladder to the side of a building, the laws become hurtful as you fall. The ladder is described as objective leaning against a building. But when the person falls down it is subjective and real. When we think about touching Jesus- we cannot do that the way May and the disciples did. Nor can we eat fish sandwiches with the physical presence of Jesus. But what we can do is feel his presence from within our hearts. We can experience Jesus because we have opened our hearts and minds to understand the scriptures, the stories that have been shared which teach us about him, but until we feel his presence from within, Jesus may not be real. And this is what might cause us to be afraid or fearful.

How does one feel the presence of the Risen Christ? We must close our eyes to what is going on in the world. We need to focus our thoughts on the images that pass by us about Jesus. Walking in a crowd, a woman reaching up to touch his cloak and is healed. Jesus going to Jairus' house and calls the little girl to get up and she does. Jesus having a fish sandwich with his friends. And more than these images are possible because the Spirit that moves us to feel Christ is God too. God is the one who created us, sent Jesus to earth to become the Christ and it is the Spirit which we feel from within.

When Peter and John spoke to the man who had been lame, they spoke of Jesus and it was in Jesus' name that they prayed for this man to be healed. Just like when we pray and ask God to act, in Jesus' name. For it because of Jesus, that Peter and John brought healing—they did not have the 'magic touch' but they believed and knew Jesus as Christ.

As we continue to live in this pandemic, with numbers of cases rising as well as people getting vaccinated, we have many feelings- stress, loneliness, wonder, happiness, and even contentment all across our beings. But what is important is that we should not be afraid to reach out to Jesus. He knows how we feel. The Spirit knows us and wants us to be in relationship but we must be willing to start or renew or even build up a relationship with God without fear. We might be afraid because we cannot touch him, nor see Jesus, but when we invite Christ Jesus into our lives, our hearts and minds, we will feel his presence and respond in new ways. This is what it means to gain new life in Christ. This is what it means to let Jesus guide our lives each day. This is what it means to live knowing the Risen Christ.

Let us pray

Jesus you are the One who died for us all. You rose from death and call us to not embrace you but to tell others of the depth of your love. Come into our hearts in these moments. Renew our faith in you. Take away our fear and enable us to feel your presence as we experience new life in you. SILENCE. Amen