



## **“Human Touch”**

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### **Scripture (NRSV):**

#### **John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## **Sermon:**

We are human.

We mediate reality through our senses. We tend to say we have five: sight, smell, taste, hearing and touching. Some say we have more. Maybe empathy is one of our senses. Some say so.

What I know, is that I trust my senses. I have always trusted them to show me the world.

As I watch my grandson, not quite 3 weeks old, I see his beginning to organize his senses and what they are sending him. Newborns don't see well, but already, he is tracking things with his eyes. Already he knows the taste of his mother, the smell of her, and his dad, and his sister. Already he knows the difference in comfort between a dry diaper and a wet one!

This is how we understand our world; through our senses.

So, if your bible has a heading for this story in the gospel of John and it says in disdain, "the story of doubting Thomas" scratch it out.

Of course Thomas doubts. He needs the confirmation of his senses! Most of us do! I refuse to despise Thomas, or somehow scorn him because he asks for, he insists on, using his God given senses to make sense of his world.

If you think about it, I bet most of your experiences of God have been mediated through your senses.

For example: I learned the love of God through the very tangible love and support of my mother and father, grandmother, sisters and brothers and friends.

I learned of thanksgiving to God through every happy sense whether eating my mother's fresh bread still hot from the oven, or playing on swings, or enraptured by the vistas of some high place in the Rocky Mountains. I can weep at sublime music, or glorious art. I love the heat of the sun on my skin. I give God thanks for all of them, and thank all of them for teaching me of God.

Again and again, I have taken what my senses have given me, and made it foundational to my faith.

Through my senses I found reason for thanks and praise to the God who created, and creates at all times.

My praise, is mediated through my senses.

And so it is for Thomas.

We are kindred in our desire to know, and in our desire to have the world make sense, through the medium of our senses.

When Jesus comes to the disciples, both times he comes to them strangely; the text says the doors were locked but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you".

It is *after* he speaks that they rejoice.

Did the disciples not trust their eyes?

Did they need the confirmation of his voice?

Did they greet the Risen One with a hug, a human touch, hand to hand?

The text does not say. But I wonder.

We do know that Thomas does touch, does confirm through eyes, and hands and ears... what he longs for, hopes for: the comforting presence of Jesus, his Lord and his God. Jesus is there, and Jesus is real. But he is still different; he is not limited by doors or by death, he is more than Rabbi, he is Lord and God.

He is, it seems, bigger, more complex, stranger, than what our senses can tell us.

The women at the tomb, the disciples in hiding, may be the first to experience Jesus resurrected, but they are not the last.

Because, there is something bigger happening than what we mediate through our senses.

Countless millions, across thousands of years, have experienced the Risen One, without the benefit of their five senses.

Countless millions across the world, and across time, recognize that our precious senses take us only so far. That though we love these bodies and their senses they can shackle us, too.

God is not found ONLY through our senses.

Just as doors no longer stop the resurrected Lord, so the limits of five senses cannot stop the glory of God, the creative power of the universe, the glorious complexity of the Creator of creation.

Our sense of smell is pathetic compared to a dog's.

Our eyes cannot see the wind the way a bird does.

Our hearing is not as acute as that of a humble housecat.

There are limitations to the world when it is mediated by only five human senses!

And yet we can experience the unbounded power of God, the presence of the resurrected Jesus, whose very first words are “peace”...this we can begin to experience beyond our sensory limitations.

Mystics have told us, age after age, that letting go of all our sensory inputs, falling into nothingness, is actually a way of finding the great Love, the great Fullness of God, the darkness that is yet brilliant. St. John of the Cross said that falling into this darkness is falling into the fathomless well of God’s love!

So, why do we continue to make music, and art, and prayers to God week after week, century after century, age upon age?

Our every effort, is a partial effort. We draw, we sing, we write our sermons to the Infinite. And yet, we only experience this Infinitude, in part!

Nonetheless, I believe this is also true about our every effort: they touch at the edges of the Nameless One whose names are infinite, and even that puny effort of touch, is full of God.

We still learn some of the names of God, those names we call out in praise, or in need or in longing: All Goodness, and Joy Maker, Master of Mercy and Love, Lord of Forgiveness, Compassion, and Justice.

It is Jesus, resurrected in infinitude, who speaks and says: “Peace”.

The Infinite says: touch my hands, my feet, my side.

The Infinite says: peace, do not be afraid.

The Infinite promises to be with those who see, and those who do not see.

With those who can touch. And those who will never touch.

We can believe in the resurrected One, with our senses and transcending our senses.

With the limitations of our short lives and five senses, and beyond them.

With our eyes seeing eternity, and our eyes seeing our siblings of the earth.

With our human touch, and without it.

We find God. We meet Jesus. They never leave us.