

Sermon 2nd of Easter 2020: Acts 2.14a,22-32; I Peter 1.3-9; John 20.19-31

This time has reminded us of the importance of many things we have taken for granted. And one of the most significant must be touch. The ability to embrace those we love. To shake hands in greeting. To reassure with a friendly pat on the shoulder or hand. Grandparents are missing hugs from their grandchildren. Families are scattered by distance. And even some couples are separated at the moment. This time has made touch very precious and how wonderful it will be when we can touch those we love again. Modern technology is a wonderful thing and we have adapted very quickly but we were not designed to live like this. The ability to touch is such an important part of what makes us human.

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. And this makes touch all the more precious. Many cannot touch loved ones who are sick at the moment. This makes the costly touch of NHS and care staff has become even more important. Jesus knew the power of touch. He touched those who were regarded as untouchable and brought them healing. He allowed himself to be touched by the woman with the ointment. But on Easter Day he told Mary Magdalene not to touch him. It was not yet time.

Touch, like our other senses, helps us to make sense of the world. There is an air of unreality about this time for many of us because we only glimpse what is happening on our screens or hear it on the radio. Thank God, most of us are removed from it. We cannot, must not, touch it. We hear what is happening but sometimes it feels like a dream, or a nightmare. We find it hard to believe that it is real. And some are tempted not to take it seriously or fall prey to false rumours and misinformation.

In our lockdown state we have a new appreciation of what it must have been like for the disciples who locked themselves away, fearing the authorities. Who heard rumours and wondered what was true. When this is all over it will be amazing for us see those we love in the flesh again. But how much more amazing must it have been for Jesus to appear among his disciples, risen from the dead. They must have been overwhelmed.

Unfortunately, Thomas was not with them on that occasion. And we can feel a lot of sympathy for him in his refusal to believe that Jesus really had risen. It just didn't make sense. It had been hard enough for Thomas to come to terms with the fact that Jesus had died. No doubt he felt very guilty at having abandoned Jesus in his hour of need. He had not been there when Jesus died. Or when his body was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb. The rituals around death help us to come to terms with it and we will need to help those who have missed out on the chance to say goodbye to loved ones. Thomas had just about managed to accept Jesus' death and then all of a sudden his fellow disciples were saying it was not so. It was just too much for him to cope with.

But Jesus met Thomas where he was. He met him in his doubt. He appeared again and offered Thomas his hands and his side to see and touch. And Thomas was able to believe. To accept that Jesus really had risen again. And that because of this he really was God. Thomas stands for all of us in those times where we doubt. And in different ways, Jesus comes to us where we are; in our own woundedness and lack of faith, and he offers us forgiveness, peace and love.

Jesus says to Thomas, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. We are blessed if we have faith, and never more so than now. Faith gives meaning in a world of confusion and anxiety. It gives hope. Purpose. Faith does not deny the reality of what is happening but asserts that these things do not have the last word. That we will get through this. Belief in the resurrection is not just the belief that Jesus rose from the dead but that through it, all of creation is renewed. Life, and love are ultimately stronger and will triumph. We cannot prove this. We cannot touch it. We have not seen it. But we believe. We know and therefore we are blessed. And as people of faith we need to share that blessing with others. The risen Jesus appeared to his disciples and said peace be with you. We too need to share that peace, that shalom, with those whose lives we touch. Amen.