

May I speak in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There's a phrase in our gospel reading that jumped out at me when I was looking at the passage this week. It's where Jesus says to his disciples, "Touch me and see". I think there's a number of reasons perhaps why it was this phrase that jumped out at me when I was considering the passage. Perhaps it's because we hear so much in the news at the moment about touching, people claiming that somebody touched them inappropriately, without their consent. We're all sensitized to the dangers of touching. But here, in this gospel reading, is Jesus inviting others to touch him. Then of course there's another gospel passage that I've often preached on, where Jesus says to Mary after the resurrection, "Don't touch me", though it's odd that we hear the opposite here.

I come from a culture that is not particularly comfortable with touching, as anybody has tried to give me a hug has found out. And actually it's not just the English who are wary of touch. Veronica Roth says this, "We are not people who touch each other carelessly. Every point of contact between us feels important: a rush of energy and relief. Touch is the first of our senses to be developed when we're a baby and it remains throughout our lives an important way for us to understand the world around us and ourselves". I read an article in Psychology Today this week about the importance of touch. And it described what it called the language of touch. And how much we communicate, not just through words, but by our touching of other people. And in this article, it was able to identify eight emotions that a control group were able to identify just through touch.

The participants were able to recognize anger, fear, disgust, love, gratification, sympathy, sadness and happiness all without words, simply with the use of touch. And we can see in our gospels that Jesus was a master communicator. And he was eloquent in the language of touch. We know, for instance, that he could heal some people at a distance without having to touch them. But there are other times we know when he made a point of touching them, famously with a leper. And of all people in

those times who you don't want to touch, it was a leper that Jesus when he healed the man with leprosy made a point of going to him and touching him.

Then we know too that Jesus was sensitive to touch. You remember that story in the gospel where in the middle of a bustling crowd. He said to his disciples, "Who touched me?" The disciples said, "Well, it could be anybody. You're in the middle of a crowd". He said, "No, somebody touched me." Somebody reached out and touched the hem of his garment. I think it's reasonable to conclude that Jesus recognized that the significance of the invitation that he issues to the disciples in this passage to touch him. Why did he say that? Clearly, a big part of what he was doing was allowing the disciples to recognize who he was. We know that when Jesus first appears to his disciples here, it says they were startled and terrified. They weren't sure who or what they were seeing. They thought they might be encountering a ghost.

Jesus' invitation was for them to discover for themselves that they were meeting the resurrected Jesus. And we all know that strong desire we have when we encounter something we're not sure what it is to reach out and touch it. That's why every museum in the world has a sign that says, "Do not touch" because we all want to touch, because that's how we learn. The disciples here in touching Jesus are discovering and exploring. "Look at my hands and my feet. See that it is I, myself. Touch me and see", Jesus said. There's an aspect of discovery to touch here. There's also a comforting aspect. If we see someone in distress, we intuitively know that they'd like to be comforted by being touched. "I need a hug" my adult daughter still says when she's down.

I think that Jesus knew that the disciples would be comforted here by touch. But there's clearly more going on in this story. What the disciples are discovering and what Luke the gospel writer wants us to know isn't just that it was Jesus appearing to his disciples but that this was Jesus in a new form. This was Jesus with a resurrection body. And this is something never seen before so it's no wonder the

disciples are confused. Jesus hasn't simply been resuscitated. He's been resurrected. He no longer has his old body. He has a new spiritual body. A body that can be recognized, touched and even eat. This is not a ghost. Jesus has not returned to them as a floating spirit. He's somehow embodied. And this is why this little resurrection story is so important. It gives us a unique insight into the nature of the resurrection body.

And of course there's a mystery about this. But let me just for a moment go with that mystery and offer a brief explanation of what it is that was seen and reading about in this encounter. What the resurrection body of Jesus shows us is entirely consistent with the view that the resurrection life is a life, an embodied life, in God's new world. Jesus' resurrection body, in fact all resurrection bodies, will not be identical to the body that we have now. In an act of new creation, parallel to God's initial act of creation, God will make a new material no longer subject to death out of the old. We will be made new. Jesus' resurrection body is at home in heaven on earth. And that's the New Testament promise that at the end of the time both dimensions of God's creation, both heaven and earth will be joined together. The kingdom of God is not an abandonment of this world. It's this world made new.

God will take up all that is good and glorious and remake it new in His new creation. Heaven is not elsewhere. It's this world restored. And our Easter hope is that we, like Jesus, will be made new and to share in this new creation, in the wonderful new life of God's restored kingdom. As Saint Paul said, "Our mortal bodies will be clothed with immortality".

Now I'm conscious that I've veered off what some might think into a rather speculative area. Let me come back and route this resurrection story into the here and now with two final thoughts. Firstly, the gospel reading ends with Jesus explaining to his disciples how he had acted in fulfillment of the scriptures. "Thus it is written", he says, "that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day. And that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations."

The death and resurrection of Jesus was no accident. This was God's plan. A plan which is to be proclaimed. And we as part of Christ's church are to be the proclaimers.

I'm delighted that the action plan that the vestry's working on that you'll be hearing about in due course begins by identifying the importance of mission and evangelism. We have a message of hope to proclaim. And a large number of our neighbors and friends have not heard anything about it. They don't know that Jesus died for them. That in him there is a promise of glorious new life. We are called to make this good news known.

And my final thought goes back to what I was saying about touch. There's a great verse in the Old Testament where there's just a passing reference to those whose hearts God has touched. And it's my firm belief, based on my own personal experience that the God made known in Jesus still reaches out to touch the hearts of his people. It might not happen regularly. You might feel it happens infrequently. But it can be the experience of every Christian believer that God reaches out to touch their hearts. We come to church each week for a number of reasons but one can be that this is a good place to open up our hearts, to be touched by God.

I'll leave my reflections on this resurrection encounter there. What I want you with is that a reminder that the resurrection hope we celebrate at Easter is not simply the celebration of an ancient story. It's the celebration of a present reality and a future hope.

Amen.