

Last time I had the privilege of preaching it was Easter day. And you may remember that I preached on St. Mark's account of the resurrection, which ended with the women running away from the empty tomb, for they were afraid, it said, in conclusion.

And this story from St. Luke, that we've just heard, picks up that fearful note. The disciples are gathered together, and Jesus comes amongst them and says, "Peace, be with you," which we're told, makes them startled and terrified. And Jesus says to them, "Why are you frightened?"

The answer to which seems pretty obvious to me. They're frightened because they've seen Jesus die. They've watched him crucified, and yet here he is speaking to them, standing amongst them. Of course, they're terrified.

Then to make them feel more comfortable and to help them overcome their doubts and to understand what's going on, Jesus says something very interesting. He says, "Touch me and see."

And I think that particular phrase caught my attention, as this year, we've not been touching each other. I spoke to someone recently who just come back from the physiotherapist. And she told me that just as the physiotherapist laid hands on her leg and started to massage her leg, she burst into tears, because she realized that it had been a year since anybody had touched her.

She was overwhelmed, simply to have that physical contact that we've all so missed. The pandemic has robbed us of that opportunity of physical contact and touch. Touch is important. It's actually the first of our senses to be developed, and it's essential to our understanding of the world and each other.

I read an article recently in Psychology Today, which described what it called, "the language of touch", and it talked about how much is communicated by a simple touch. The article identified eight emotions that were communicated by touch, that participants in this study could recognize the emotion that was being communicated. Anger, fear, disgust, love, gratitude, sympathy, sadness, and happiness were all

communicated successfully in this experiment, through the language of touch.

Victoria Roth says, "We are not people who touch each other carelessly. Every point of contact between us feels important, a rush of energy and relief."

And we see in the gospels that Jesus as a master communicator, is eloquent in the language of touch. We know from some of the healing stories that Jesus could heal at a distance. And yet on some occasions, specific mention is made of how and why he touches those whom he is healing. He made a point of touching the leper, for example, who he healed. And Jesus was sensitive to being touched.

Do you remember that story of how in the midst of a crowd, he suddenly stops when somebody touched the hem of his garment and said, "Who touched me?"? And then another resurrection appearance. He was careful to say to Mary Magdalen, "Don't touch me."

So, I think it's fair to conclude that Jesus recognizes the significance of his invitation that is offered here in this gospel reading for the disciples to touch him. Why did he issue such an invitation? Clearly a big part of it was so that the disciples would realize that it was really him.

We know that when Jesus first appears to his disciples, they were startled and terrified. They weren't sure who or what they were seeing. They thought they might be seeing a ghost. Jesus' invitation was for them to discover for themselves that they were meeting the resurrected Jesus.

And we all know how strong the desire is when we see something that we haven't seen before, that when we want to get to know something better, we instinctively want to reach out and touch it. That's why museums have so many signs saying, "Do not touch." It's because we want to touch, to explore and discover.

"Look at my hands and feet. See that it is I myself," Jesus says. "Touch me and see."

There's an aspect of discovery to touch. There's also a comforting aspect. If someone is in distress, we know intuitively that they could be comforted by a sympathetic touch. "I need a hug," says my daughter when she's upset.

I think that Jesus knew that the disciples would be comforted by a touch, and there's clearly more going on in this story, this brief resurrection story,

What the disciples are discovering and what Luke, the gospel writer wants us to know, isn't just that Jesus was appearing to the disciples, but that this was Jesus in a new form. This was Jesus with a resurrected body. This is something that had never been seen before.

Jesus wasn't simply resuscitated. He was resurrected. He no longer had his old earthly body. He had a new spiritual body, a body that can be recognized, touched, and even eat. This is not a ghost. Jesus had not returned to them as a floating spirit. He's very much embodied.

And this is why this resurrection story is so important. It gives us a unique insight into the question of the nature of the resurrection body. And of course, there's a great mystery here, and I don't want to get caught up in the weeds but let me just say something and give a brief explanation about what we can see going on in this encounter.

What the resurrected body of Jesus shows us is entirely consistent with the view that the resurrection life is an embodied life, an embodied life in God's new world. Jesus's resurrection body, in fact, all of our resurrection bodies, will not be identical to the bodies that we have now. And let's be grateful for that. In an act of new creation, parallel to God's original act of creation, God will make a new material, no longer subject to death, out of the old one. We will all be made anew, just as Jesus in his resurrection was made new.

Jesus's resurrection body is at home on earth as it is at home in heaven. And that's the New Testament promise, that at the end of time, both dimensions of God's creation, heaven and earth, will be joined

together. The kingdom of God is not an abandonment of this world. It is this world made new.

God will take up all that is good and glorious and remake it. Heaven is not elsewhere. It is this world restored, created, creation fulfilled as it was meant to be. And our Easter hope is that we, like Jesus Christ, will be made new, to share with him the wonderful new life of God's restored kingdom.

As St Paul says, "Our mortal bodies will be clothed with immortality." This is good news. We have a wonderful message of hope to proclaim. And during this last year of pandemic, we've heard lots of talk about death. We've been keeping score of those who've died of COVID. And what we celebrated this Easter season is that death is not the end. Death does not have the final word. We're called to make this wonderful truth known.

Jesus said to the disciples, "You are witnesses of these things." And we are Jesus' witnesses now. We are called to make known that in Jesus Christ, there is a glorious promise of new life. Hallelujah. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah.

And I want to add a PS, just before my camera man, intervenes to end this sermon prematurely. It goes back to what I was saying about touch. There's a great verse in the Old Testament, a reference to the fact that God whose hearts God had touched. It is my firm belief based on personal experience, that the God who is made known in Jesus still reaches out to touch his people.

It might not happen regularly. It might hardly feel as if it happens at all, but it can be the experience of every believer, to have hearts who God has touched. We come to church each week. We watch the video each week for many reasons, but one can be that it is a good place to open up our hearts, to ask God to touch us.

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