

Journey into Touching

Week 4a: 22 March 2009

Theme of the Week

Mothering Sunday



STARTING OUT

Reach out!

On Mothering Sunday it is appropriate that we consider the spiritual effects of touching and being touched by those we love. If we have been blessed with a happy childhood then it is the experience of closeness and the loving touch of parents which makes us feel safe and confident. Without that loving touch and sense of security children find it harder to flourish.

Reaching out and touching others is not only a profoundly important part of our human experience it is also part of our spirituality. We share and show love by touching. We comfort and console by touching. We are intimate with our partners by touching. We experience closeness with our parents, children, siblings, other family members and friends when we embrace. Touch experiences can bring intense feelings of mutual love, peace and joy.



The first task: to find a frontier. I am not, after all, everything.

Archbishop Rowan Williams

Activity

Find some plasticine or craft materials and use them to make a model or picture of a person in your family or a pet. Do this with children if possible. Concentrate on the way your fingers touch the materials and how you have to use touch to get the effects you want. What does it feel like to do this activity? What does it teach you about the experience of touch?

Poem by kind permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury; © Rowan Williams 2009



**A cancer patient shares
an affectionate moment
with her husband**



There are some people who cannot bear to be touched, perhaps because of abuse or a medical condition. How can we 'reach out' to such people in a way that does not make things worse?

GOING DEEPER

Thinking about being untouchable

A story

A woman gave birth to a premature baby who was so ill that he had immediately to be whisked away to the Special Care Baby Unit. He had to be kept warm and helped to breathe and she was told that because he was so small he might die.

The baby's mother then said that the hardest thing in the weeks that followed was that it was not possible to hold her baby as he was so fragile. At certain times she was allowed to stroke him with a finger, but he could not be picked up or cuddled. She wanted more than anything else to touch him, but he was untouchable. She felt very alone seeing other mothers with their babies, feeding them, changing them, holding them and carrying them. She felt that she could not be a proper mother until she had had the chance to touch her baby properly and missed being pregnant. She also felt that he was not somehow her baby, just a 'patient' until he could be held. When the baby was finally strong enough to be picked up and fed, she said that she just wanted to thank God. She and her baby were a family at last.



Jesus too knew the importance of touch, healing by touch and blessing children by taking them in his arms. He sought out and touched those who could not otherwise be touched, making them whole again and restoring them to their families and communities.

Some questions to think about

- How do you think the mother felt while she was separated from her sick baby?
- What kind of feelings do you think the baby experienced?
- What other kinds of separation can make people feel like this?

Further reading: Rosemary Kay, *Saul*, St Martin's Press, 2000.





MOVING ON

Engaging with scripture differently

This section is based on the Radio 4 programme's alternative reading for this Sunday.

Exodus 2.5-10

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' ⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Some questions to think about:

- What do you think Moses' birth mother felt about giving him up?
- What do you think Pharaoh's daughter felt about finding the baby?
- What do you think Moses felt about his early life when he grew up? How might it have shaped his later life?

MOVING INTO LENT

Touch sensations of the desert

As Jesus spent time in the desert, he must have been very aware of the texture and shape of his surroundings. The ground would be hard under his feet and the rocks and stones sharp and gritty to his fingers. Vegetation would be coarse and dry and he would feel the touch of both heat and cold and night and day came and went. Since he was fasting, the feel of water would be especially important, and he could not but have connected powerfully with God's creation and his own place as a human being. Perhaps he encountered the thorns that would later be his crown, the touch of dust and flies that he would be able to do nothing about at his crucifixion.





Photo: Ester Inbar

Some questions to think about

- What do you think it was like for Jesus to be 'out of touch' with human beings?
- What touch experiences would he have noticed during his time in the desert and what might they have meant to him in his own ministry?
- Jesus was a carpenter, working with his hands, what might this have taught him about touch?
- What might Jesus have learned about the need for human touch and especially the needs of those who were untouchable?

RESTING ON THE WAY

Prayer and reflection

We should think of God watching us moment by moment, mirroring back to us our human actions – our fears and our joys and our struggles – until he can at last reach out in the great gestures of the healing ministry and the cross. And at last we let ourselves be touched and changed.

Archbishop Rowan Williams, Christmas Message to the Anglican Communion 2004

Lord,

*We ask you to bless all those who are parents;
mothers who wait for their children at night,
fathers with car keys waiting for a call*





*We ask you to help all those who are parents,
who find it hard to look after their children,
who find themselves tried, and sometimes fail*

*We ask you to uphold all those who are parents
who foster, adopt, or care for hurt children
and for all who bring joy into children's lives.*

*We ask you to hold all those who are parents,
whose children are lost, separated or dead
whose touch is remembered and longed for and
mourned*

*We thank you that we are always your children
and that you gather us tenderly under your wings*

Amen



Where else can this journey take me?

There is more material to explore in *Sense Making Faith* in the 'Journey into Touching' chapter and you can explore further journeys and ideas in the Explore section of www.spiritualjourneys.org.uk in the section called 'Touch'. This resource is paired with one on the sense of Touch and you might want to look at some of the different sections in that resource on this site.

Have a look at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/body/factfiles/touch/touch.shtml>

For writing on God as Mother, look at: Julian of Norwich, *The Revelations of Divine Love*, Penguin Classics, new edition 1998.

Rosemary Kay, *Saul*, St Martin's Press, 2000.

The Daily Service on Radio 4 from March 23rd to 26th offers more readings and reflections for you to listen to about people whose spiritual journeys were changed by the experience of touch.

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