

Daily Readings

Week 4 - Journey into Touching

Beginning Sunday 22nd March with

Judas kisses Jesus

Mark 14:43-50

Exodus 2.5-10

Theme of the week:

Touch leads spiritually to healing or hurt.

Monday 23 March

The touch of oppression

Isaiah 53:3-6

³He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

In Isaiah, the servant of God experiences touch as suffering. He is seen to be beaten and wounded, bruised and hurt. His physical injuries and the pain he endures are also painful spiritual experiences: he suffers to spare others. He takes upon himself punishment and pain for sin, so we do not have to experience the same things. How can we imagine what separation from God is like, and what spiritual pain is like if our sin keeps us from being with God? The answer is that we know what physical pain through our touch experiences is like. We hate pain and seek to avoid it, so we should also think about spiritual pain too. So the suffering servant of God reminds us not only to avoid sin and turn to God, but shows us also what Jesus will do for us. He will endure the physical pain of crucifixion and the spiritual pain of feeling forsaken by God, and through this suffering bring healing to everyone who wants to be relieved of sin and its painful consequences.

Question for reflection:

How much would you willingly suffer to save someone you love?

Tuesday 24 March

The gift of touch

Luke 10:30-37

³⁰Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' ³⁷He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Study of this passage usually concentrates on the enemy who helps and cares for the victim as opposed to the 'friends' who ignore his plight and pass him by. But this passage asks us to reflect on the gift of healing touch. The man is hurt, he has been beaten up and left to die. He cannot help himself. The priest and the Levite won't touch him, but the Samaritan does more than just care. He responds with caring and healing touch. He touches and soothes the wounds and bandages them so they will not hurt any more and begin to heal. He lifts the man in his arms to put him on his animal and must have physically supported him all the way to the inn. There, he commits the man to the caring touch of others, paying their wages for nursing. Through this caring and healing touch, the man can be restored. So when Jesus says 'go and do likewise' he tells us not to be one of those who will not touch those who are unfortunate or hurt, but to be healers and carers, offering the touch of care and concern to whoever needs it.

Question for reflection:

How does the experience of loving and healing touch when we are hurt, ill or sad, help us to know more of God's love?

Wednesday 25 March

Touched by the Holy Spirit

(Annunciation) Luke 1:26-35

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit

will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

How can we be touched by God? This passage gives us some important insight into how God touches us and loves us. Mary asks the angel how she is going to become pregnant without a man. The angel tells her that she will conceive her baby by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit can be intimately involved with any human person, can 'indwell' us, touch, focus and direct our lives. When the Holy Spirit is present with us, like this, it has effects in the real world. This spiritual touch, the grace of God, shows us that God is not some distant observer of the world, but completely and lovingly involved with it. The reality of this experience for Mary is the physical body of the baby she conceives and to whom she gives birth. The touch of the Holy Spirit is not a merely supernatural or otherworldly experience but a relationship with God that matters in the real world.

Question for reflection:

Where do you see evidence of the Holy Spirit touching and transforming lives?

Thursday 26 March

A sick woman touches Jesus

Mark 5:25-34

²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' ²⁹Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' ³¹And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' ³²He looked all round to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

This passage tells us something very specific about Jesus and healing by touch. Faith and trust in Jesus as the Son of God is an important element in the healing process. The sick woman does not decide to touch Jesus just on the offchance, but because she realises his touch is *different* from all the other physicians and faith-healers she has come across. To touch Jesus is to come into contact directly with the loving, healing God. Moreover, Jesus recognises and responds to the touch of faith, even though the woman only just manages to touch his cloak. Jesus is surrounded by touch experiences, as the crowd push, shove and jostle him. But the trusting touch of faith is different and immediately gains a healing response from Jesus. Feeling her touch, Jesus seeks out the sick woman and confirms both her faith and her healing.

Question for reflection:

How do you think the woman felt physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually when she told Jesus what she did?