

Who Touched Me? – A Reflection by Mairi Clunas

In these times when we are encouraged to observe social distancing, we may feel a sense of isolation which is both physical and psychological. As we prayerfully read the Gospel it may also strike us – by contrast – just how often Jesus reached out and touched people, whether to bring them healing, affirmation or blessing.

Moreover, this experience of the touch of Jesus is not confined to the Gospel text; through awareness and attentiveness to our own interior spiritual senses in the prayer; we too can make real contact with the Risen Lord.

As Origen wrote in the third century, *‘Christ has become the object of each of the senses of the soul - he became the Word made flesh tangible, substantial, so that the inner woman or man may be able to grasp the word of life’*.

The following gospel words and images provide touchstones helping us to discover those moments when we may have sensed the Lord’s gentle touch.

The Healing of Peter’s Mother-in-law (Mark 1 29:31) - A touch which strengthens and affirms.

‘Now, Simon’s Mother-in-law had gone to bed with fever, and they told him about her straight away. He went to her, **took her by the hand and helped her up**. And the fever left her and she began to wait on them’. It is through the intercession of Peter’s family that Jesus is made aware of the woman’s illness, and he responds to their concerns. Have you ever felt that others were praying for you? This is a touch of Christ which often brings renewed strength and hope.

The cure of the Leper (Mark 1 40:43) - A touch that purifies and restores.

‘A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees. “If you want to”, he said, “you can cure me”. Feeling sorry for him, **Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him**. “Of course I want to,” he said. “Be cured!” And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured.’

This is the touch of Christ which we may experience in the sacraments where his gentle and affirming presence brings freedom and hope. We realise that we have been renewed and restored.

Peter is saved from drowning (Matthew 14 25:33) - The touch which upholds and saves

‘When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the lake they were terrified and cried out in fear. “It is a ghost,” they said. At once, Jesus called out to them saying, “Courage! It is I, do not be afraid.” It was Peter who answered. “Lord,” he said” if it is you, let me come to you across the water”. “Come!” said Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and began walking towards Jesus on the water, but when he felt the force of the wind he took fright and began to sink and cried out, “Lord, save me!” **Jesus stretched out his hand at once and held him.**’

Like Peter, we have all experienced times of alarm when the waters have risen to our neck and there seems to be no foothold. Whether it is a sudden crisis or an ongoing struggle with difficult circumstances. If we are able to keep still though, in the midst of the storm, we may discover that Another is indeed with us to support us.

Jesus washes the disciples’ feet (John 13 1:5) - A touch which soothes and heals

‘Jesus got up from his table, removed his outer garment and taking a towel wrapped it round his waist. **He then poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and dry them** with the towel he was wearing’

Jesus here reveals something of the loving kindness which lies at the heart of God. There are times when we have to surrender ourselves into his care, yet, we may resist this state of powerlessness and inactivity. Do you feel comfortable simply resting in God’s love?

Thomas and Jesus (John 20 25:27) - The touch which illumines and transforms.

‘The doors were closed but Jesus came in and stood among them. “Peace be with you” he said. Then he spoke to Thomas. **“Put your finger here: look, here are my hands. Give me your hand, put into my side.** Doubt no longer but believe”. Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God”.

In prayer we may feel that we are in search of God who is searching for us. Somewhere along our pilgrimage of faith we may experience a ‘touch’ of insight which transforms our understanding of ourselves and of God. Such was the case of Thomas and the two disciples in the inn at Emmaus. As a consequence, our whole outlook is changed.