

Jesus Touched Them

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year A: Transfiguration February 18-19, 2023

Matthew 17:1-9 Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Jesus shone revealing to Peter, James and John who He was. It was encouragement for the days ahead. We too, need God-moments to encourage us in our faith. They are a gift of God's grace. God calls us to go touch others.

Beloved of God, may God's glory and grace be with us this day. Amen.

I see it each and every time youth go to Sky Ranch camp. Away from their usual, comfortable settings, away from technology and their phones, youth experience God on the mountaintop at camp. Perhaps it's in the meeting of a new friend. Maybe a little bit of homesickness and needing to rely on the kindness of staff. It is a deep conversation with a counselor late at night, the words of a song around the campfire, or flying down the zip line. God touches their hearts, their minds, their spirits in a brand-new way.

One might think that these mountain-top experiences aren't really necessary because they are disconnected from the 'stuff of life.' The argument goes, church has nothing to do with reality. Yet, as is demonstrated in our text for today, Jesus and God the Father would argue otherwise.

The disciples have just learned that Jesus will be crucified and raised from the dead. We can imagine how disturbing this news would be to them. Particularly

for Peter, who exclaims, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” (Mt 16:22)

After rebuking Peter sternly, Jesus replies in kind that any who wish to follow Him, must deny themselves and take up their crosses. This is the kind of life the Lord will be requiring if you wish to get in line.

God in God’s goodness knows what His followers need. Always. Therefore, six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John, those first disciples, up a mountain. We know how the story goes. As the disciples watch from a distance, Jesus looks completely different than He ever has before. His countenance has changed. His clothes are glowing. He is brighter than the sun itself. Elijah the great prophet, is chatting Jesus up. Moses who received the Ten Commandments and led the Israelites from slavery to freedom...his presence represents God’s covenant with the people. Jesus, standing alongside these two, He is greater than all the law or the prophets before Him. God is being revealed in a new way for a particular reason.

Suddenly God’s voice proclaims from a cloud this is the Beloved Son who must be listened to. It is enough to make Peter, James and John hit the floor, or the ground as it were.

Have you ever been as afraid as they were? So afraid in the moment that you truly didn’t know what might happen next? Overcome with fear. Shaking in your boots. Heart pounding and palms sweating kind of fear because of the external circumstances out of your control.

Who wouldn’t be terrified? God moments can scare the daylights out of us. One minute everything seems normal and then the next minute, we hear a voice that we know is not our own. Or we see a vision while we’re praying. Or God’s presence fills our bodies with warmth. We fall to our knees. Or it’s a silence that roars in our ears. God moments are the in breaking of a new dawn. Experiencing the divine is not an everyday occurrence.

Jesus knew that. God knows what His followers need. Therefore, Jesus touched them. He touched them.

Human touch is one of the gifts of God. A hand on the shoulder at a Doctor’s office can make all the difference. A touch can stop the trembling. A hug can calm our breathing. Fingers rubbing makes us know we are seen and cared for.

Human contact changes brain patterns and stops fear. We can bet that earthquake survivors were being held and touched when first rescued over these last 10 days.

*He touched me, O, He touched me,
And O, the joy that floods my soul.
Something happened, and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole. (Bill Gaither. 1963)*

God gave the disciples the gift of the transfiguration experience so they would be encouraged in their walk of faith. These three apostles would play the largest role in founding the Church. To embolden and comfort them in the sufferings their Lord was to undergo, God granted them a vision of the future. It was a foretaste of what would come; a community gathered under the Lordship of Jesus the Son. The blessedness of heaven had come to earth, to the mountaintop, even if momentarily.

Because God is truly beyond our comprehension, beyond all we can imagine; the Holy Spirit understands we can only encounter the divine in tiny tastes. God graciously grants these transient experiences in our faith walk. They serve as breadcrumbs along the way, which we can digest for years to come in memory and heart. We can return to that moment God touched us again and again, to draw from it strength in faith. God is real. God is present. God is here with me.

If you don't think you've ever had a mountaintop experience of God, reflect for a moment on the ways you've felt God through other humans. The dearest of friends called right at the moment you thought you were all alone. A clerk took extra time with you when there was a long line as if you were the most important person in the world. When there were no words to be said, your spouse didn't use words, but only gave you a hug that said everything that was needed.

Here too, is God. God in the flesh, the Incarnate One capable of touching, holding, leading, comforting, guiding us in our moments of fear or joy. Trust this God who comes to us revealing all we need to know in that exact instant. Glory be to Jesus who touched us and made us whole. Amen.