

Out of the five senses that God has given us to help us perceive the world he's created, which one would you pick as your favorite? Would you choose sight, hearing, taste, smell, or touch? More importantly, which of these senses would be impossible for us to live without? I don't think any of us can respond to this question very easily, but let's try to narrow it down and find an answer.

Having the gift of sight is pretty remarkable isn't it? Our eyes help us take in and enjoy the immense beauty of our world; from the splendor of a sunset, to the exquisiteness of a van Gogh painting! It can be extremely amazing and heartwarming to see a loved one smile, and there is something inspiring about witnessing a glorious rainbow in the sky after it rains.

Hearing is also a pretty wonderful gift right? Think of all the great things we enjoy with our ears: symphonies, rock concerts, the sound of a babbling brook, the crack of thunder on a stormy night. In fact, I am constantly surprised at how uplifted I can begin to feel when a favorite song of mine comes on the radio, or when a friend or relative calls me to have a chat.

And ohhhh, just thinking about all the wonderful things we enjoy eating makes my stomach start to growl, and my mouth begin to water. There is nothing quite like biting into a delicious, crispy, sweet apple, and who doesn't enjoy sipping a frosty mug of cold root beer with some vanilla ice cream in it. All we have to do is think about all the wonderful comfort foods, and restaurants we enjoy eating at, to see how fantastic the gift of taste is to us.

So what about the other two senses that are left, smell and touch? Now I don't know why, but when I think of being able to smell I think about the things in life I don't enjoy smelling; such as the horrible aromas that come from our bodies. Of course, most of us know the saying, "we need to stop and smell the roses once and a while," but with all the fantastic scents out there, there are also countless disgusting fragrances to be found as well.

Last but not least, God has given us the gift of touch! As I was thinking about our Gospel story for today, I was extremely fixated on the part where the woman who had been suffering for 12 years, reaches out to touch Jesus believing that if she can just graze his cloak she will be healed from her disease! I'm sure that being an outcast, being forbidden to touch others, for fear of making them unclean, must have been an overwhelming experience for her to have to live with.

Imagine what it must have been like for that woman to be unable to touch the people she loved or have them touch her in return. After this past year of social distancing, this is something many of us can relate to and understand right? Just think about how much we need, rely, and depend on human contact. The joy we feel when someone gives us a hug, or a loving pat on the back for a job well done. The pleasure we experience when we kiss someone for the first time or hold hands with the person we love.

Of course, one could also argue, that there are things in this world that we don't want to touch, or things we go out of our way to avoid touching! Sometimes when we see something disgusting we say, "Ewww or Gross!" Let's face it, there are some icky things in the world we try to avoid like:...Dog dodo, vomit, snot, rotting trash, smelly dirty bathrooms...

For reasons we don't fully understand, the ancient Hebrews felt the exact same way about a number of different things. Certain animals, foods, diseases, bodily fluids, and dead things made the people say, Ugh, Eww, Gross, don't touch them!" Such things were "unclean" or "impure." If you touched them you became unclean.

This mindset also applied to certain people as well, such as: lepers, Samaritans, possessed individuals like the demoniac that Jesus exorcised after crossing that stormy lake last week, and it applied to the ladies we encounter in

Mark's Gospel this morning; like the woman suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years, or Jairus' little girl who is dying.

They were considered unclean, and therefore they were to be avoided at all costs. And being unclean back then meant more than being dirty or smelly, rather it referred to the relationships between people, or things, and God. Unclean things and people were estranged, separated from God and each other. In other words, they weren't supposed to touch or interact with one another. In some ways the Biblical understanding of unclean things is similar to the popular saying, "One bad apple spoils the whole bunch!"

Contact with an unclean thing made you an unclean person, and to some degree there is some truth to this. If you hang around someone with a contagious disease, you are likely to end up with the same sickness. If you hang around with the wrong group of people, their bad influence may "spoil" you. There may be some good reasons to stay away from certain people and things.

Jesus however mixes everything up. Jesus doesn't become unclean by contact with unclean people. They don't bring him down to their level. Jesus' holiness transforms the unclean. The flow of blood is stopped. The woman is healed. The corpse comes back to life. The young girl gets out of bed. Throughout the Gospels Jesus participates at feasts with tax collectors and sinners. He hangs around with people in situations that may have caused witnesses, or those looking on to say, "Ug! Eww, or Gross!"

Of course, we don't picture Jesus thinking, or saying these things, rather we picture him with a smile on his face, offering up a hug, or a healing touch. His holiness transforms people's uncleanliness, raises them up, raises us up, to his level. The son of God makes us worthy to be in the presence of God. Jesus, as the one good, holy apple, can transform all the bad apples in the barrel into good apples.

Whenever touch is used in Mark's gospel in relation to Jesus, it is typically related to some form of healing. Let's face it, touch can affect us, and often times it can transform us. Consider the following poem by Ann Weems in the book *Reaching for Rainbows*.

“What is all this touching in church? It used to be a person could come to church and sit in the pew and not be bothered by all this friendliness and certainly not by touching. I used to come to church and leave untouched. Now I have to be nervous about what's expected of me. I have to worry about responding to the person sitting next to me. Oh I wish it could be the way it used to be; I could just ask the person next to me: how are you? And the person could answer: Oh, just fine, and we'd both go home strangers who have known each other for twenty years. But now the minister asks us to look at each other.

I'm worried about that hurt look I saw in that woman's eyes. Now I'm concerned, because when the minister asks us to pass the peace, the man next to me held my hand so tightly. I wondered if he had been touched in years. Now I'm upset because the lady next to me cried and then apologized and said it was because I was so kind and that she needed a friend right now. Now I have to get involved. Now I have to suffer when this community suffers. Now I have to be more than a person coming to observe a service.

O Lord, be here beside me. You touch me, Lord, so that I can touch and be touched! So that I can care and be cared for! So that I can share my life with all those others that belong to you! All this touching in church, it's changing me!”

Today we witness a woman who has suffered for 12 long years healed by touching Jesus, and not only is she physically healed, but she is healed in other ways as well! Remember I mentioned earlier that uncleanness, especially the three big ones, leprosy, discharge, and corpse touching, were about relationships. Individuals who were considered unclean were kicked out of the community, were

considered outsiders, and they could no longer have any real human contact! So...when Jesus calls the woman who touched him “daughter” he establishes a relationship with one whom society had deemed he should not have a relationship with.

Her illness made her unclean. Her possible foolishness with doctors, her seeking a cure, had left her impoverished. Her brazen invasion of Jesus’ space (touching Jesus’ garment) in the eyes of others should have made Jesus unclean, and could have put him off, but it didn’t. By calling her daughter he established the same kind of relationship with her as Jairus had with his daughter. And like Jairus, Jesus would do anything possible to save his daughter and to save us!

There are times when I’ve met unchurched people, or non-believers, who do nothing but complain about their lives –express nothing but misery about their health, their jobs, their children, etc..and I think, “How much more whole would their lives be if they had a relationship with Jesus?” If they were touched by him in some way? Then I wonder, how can we help bring them into that relationship? How can we represent Jesus to them? How can we touch them as Jesus would touch them?

If we follow the example our Savior sets for us in today’s story, we begin to understand that our faith can sometimes lead us into some gross, uncomfortable situations featuring some rather interesting people. All three characters that Jesus encounters after the stormy lake crossing; the demoniac, the menstruating woman, and Jairus’ daughter transfer their uncleanness to Jesus, and Jesus bestows the cleansing wholeness of God upon them. The same is true for us! Jesus takes our sin, our filth, our dirtiness, and he washes them away from us. Through his sacrifice on the cross we are made clean, and we are made whole.

The power that touch has over our lives is often transformational, and can lead us into new relationships with others. I believe that most of us, if not all of us

in worship this morning, have in some way, or another, been touched by Christ and this has hopefully led us to make some changes in our lives. In fact, hopefully after encountering Jesus in Word, in Scripture, and in the lives of others we have learned that discipleship is not about getting our needs met! It is about being in the presence of Jesus, being known by him, getting to know him, following his work, his teachings, and his ways, and once we have been touched by him we are to go out and touch others as he has touched us! Amen!