

Connection in a time of isolation

Palm Sunday 5 April 2020

Unshakeable God, you are our ever-present help in times of trouble. Among all the isolation, grief and fear caused by this crisis, renew in us your peace, restore to us your perspective, and reveal to us your presence as we spend this time with you now. Amen.

We rejoice in God's intricate involvement in our lives today, and praise him in the words of Psalm 139:13-17

- ¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
- ¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

Today, as we reflect on the importance of connection in a time of isolation, we turn to the beautiful story of Jesus healing a sick woman, imagining the changing expressions on her face and on his face as this encounter unfolds:

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. ⁴³ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. ⁴⁵ Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." ⁴⁷ When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

Luke 8:42b-48 (NRSV)

In Jesus' day there were strict rules forbidding the touching of anyone or anything considered ritually unclean including lepers, corpses and even menstruating women. (Perhaps this kind of regulation of touch may seem a little less strange to us now, finding ourselves forbidden from hand-shaking and hugging, required to sanitise our hands after every encounter.) This poor woman was not just sick, she was untouchable. Years of chronic hemorrhaging had brought the added stigma of isolation and shame. No wonder she 'came trembling and fell at Jesus' feet'. Her touch was supposed to infect Jesus, but instead His touch healed her, and His words restored her dignity.

In this time of isolation people need connection more than ever. Thinking through the day ahead, we ask the Lord to put particular people on our hearts to call, to give us opportunities to smile and wave to those we might pass in the street, to help us love and listen to those we meet - even if it's only online.

Pause and pray

We name before you now Lord those known to us who are self-isolating, asking that this may be a season in which they go deeper in their relationship with you.

Pause and pray

At this time of isolation from human touch, we hear again the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:20:

'Remember,' he says, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

To the one whose goodness is without equal,
whose love is beyond comparison,
whose mercy is beyond understanding,
and whose power is beyond words,
be praise and glory,
worship and thanksgiving,
now and always.

Amen.