

## **2024 04 14 – *Touching Christ's Wounds***

**Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

I remember a day when I was about thirteen. I was in the farmhouse kitchen with my mother and grandmother when we heard Neil, one of my older brothers, shouting from the barn. My mother immediately headed out the door to see what had happened. Knowing the machinery that Neil was working with, I knew there was a good chance that he had somehow caught one of his limbs in an auger. I can still remember the worst-case scenarios going through my head.

It turned out that Neil's leg was stuck in the auger, but luckily it had mostly caught his clothing. He was scraped pretty badly and needed to go to the hospital for stitches; but no lasting damage was done. Except maybe to my opinion of my maternal grandmother. It was that day that I found out that Grandma Montgomery did not deal well with blood and gore. When my mother headed out to the barn, she was the only adult left in the house. Instead of figuring out what she could do to help, I just remember her saying loudly, "I don't want to see. Don't let me see!" How often in our lives do we turn our heads from things that we just "don't want to see?"

Today's scripture reading is one of two post-resurrection appearance stories that occur in the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, the disciples are still talking about their previous encounter on the road to Emmaus when Jesus' appears in their midst saying, "Peace be with you." The disciples are frightened by their rabbi's ghostly presence, so Jesus attempts to reassure them by saying, "Touch me and see—a

ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as I do." And then Jesus shows them his wounds. I wonder how many of Jesus' disciples were reluctant to "touch and see" the wounds that the risen Christ was showing them? We know that most of Jesus' disciples hid out of fear for their own lives, while Jesus was crucified. How many of them were able to deal with the reality of his wounds?

These post-resurrection appearance stories, whether we take them literally or figuratively, have much to teach us. This particular story helps us to consider our own need to see and to touch the wounds of the Risen Christ. If we believe that Christ is Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being, our Creator, then the wounds of Risen Christ are also the wounds of the world.

We are being called to see and to touch all the places where the world is hurting. We are being called to see and to touch the violence, the oppression, and the systemic racism. We are being called to see and to touch the hunger, the sickness, and the loneliness. We are being called to see and to touch the places where creation itself is wounded and scarred. We are being called to see and to touch even those things that frighten us, even those things that we just don't want to see.

I recognize that we all have to know our own boundaries. We live in a world so wounded that "seeing and touching" all that pain can sometimes be overwhelming. Personally, I rarely watch the news on TV. Instead I listen on the radio, or even more often, read it online. Then I can choose which videos to watch and which stories to read. I make myself aware of what is happening in

the world without overwhelming my senses and my emotions. There is a fine line that we all have to walk as we figure out for ourselves how much information is too much and how much is enough.

Our reason for seeing and touching goes beyond believing that the wounds exist. We are also called to do something about them. In the scripture reading Jesus says, "You are witnesses of all this." We are being called to pay attention to what is happening and to do our part to heal the wounds of the world. Marcus Borg puts it this way:

Paying attention to God means the practice of compassion and justice.

They are God's passion.... God loves the world, not just you and me and us. (The Heart of Christianity, 2003, pg. 200)

We know that God's love for the world, for each one of us, is unconditional and everlasting. God's concern or compassion is the same. We are called to live out that compassion in the world. One of the ways that we do that is by giving to those in need. This is called charity. As a church we have done and continue to do many charitable actions: we have held Loose Change Suppers, given money and needed items to many charitable organizations within Swift Current, we have made the goods in our boutique and garage sale available for free to those in need. We have a Benevolent Fund that allows us to give Coop gift cards and motel rooms to transients and those in our own community who need help. We also show our compassion through pastoral visiting and hospitality.

But there is another side to compassion. It is called justice. Justice is the social or systemic form of compassion. Marcus Borg wrote:

Charity means helping the victims. Justice asks, “Why are there so many victims?” and then seeks to change the causes of victimization, that is, the way the system is structured. (The Heart of Christianity, 2003, pg. 200)

The problem is that Christians have tended to be good at charity but not so good at justice. Borg explains:

One reason is that charity never offends: a passion for justice often does. To paraphrase Roman Catholic bishop Dom Helder Camara from Brazil: “When I gave food to the poor, they called me a saint; when I asked why there were so many poor, they called me a communist.”

Here at First United, we do have some folks who are working for justice by filling out petitions and writing letters to politicians. Our Affirming Ministry Group and Earthcare Partners are two teams that continue to seek justice for our neighbours and for the earth itself. This is important work. But as Borg pointed out it isn't always popular. Last fall, when we put up a sign supporting the LGBTQ community, we did get a few angry emails and phone calls. But when, “touching and seeing” Christ's wounds moves us to actions for justice, then sometimes we will get negative feedback. Justice means change and there are lots of people in this world who do not want the balance of power to change.

We are called to see and to touch even when we don't want to look. We are called to find our place in this healing work, this work of compassion and justice. Christ's wounds are many. Obviously we can't expect to heal them all, at least not by ourselves. We are called to see and touch one of Christ's wounds and then find others who have discovered that same wound. We are called to work together to heal the world one wound at a time.

May it be so. Amen.