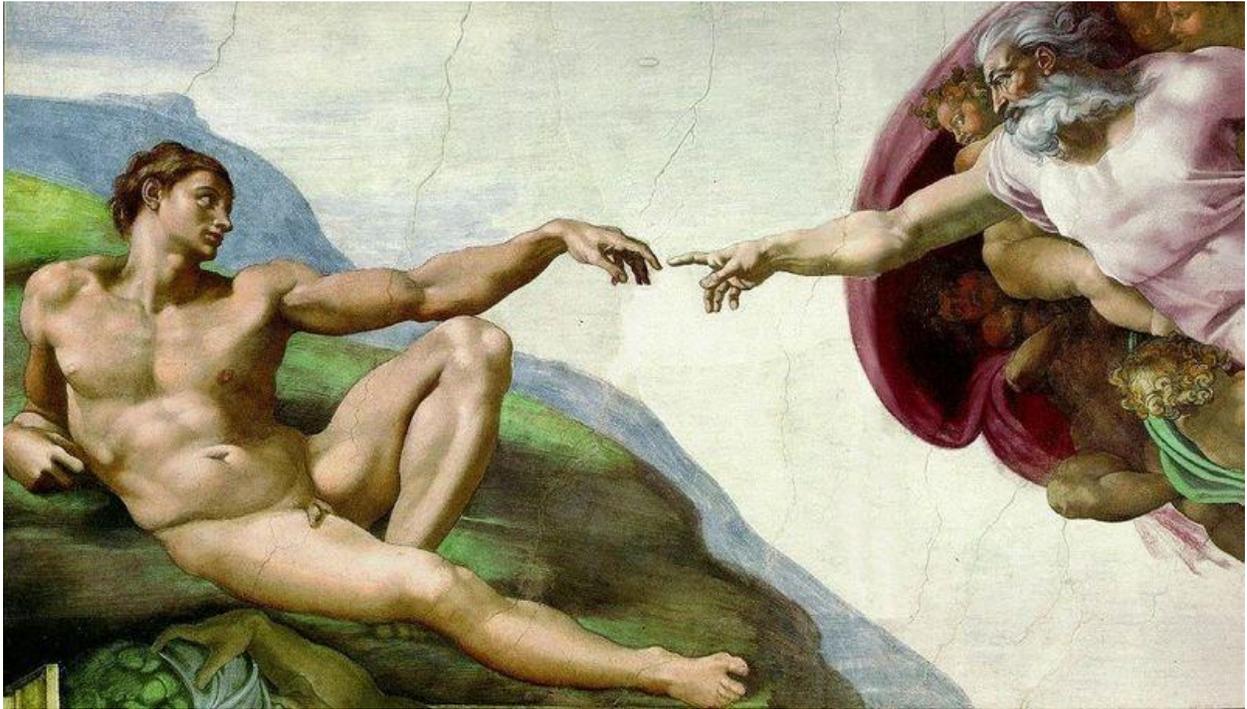


The Healing Power of Touch



The other day I had, what I can only describe as, a dismal experience. Those of you who have read my last reflection (or should I call it 'blog'?!) will recollect that I began by saying I hadn't been wearing a watch since March, when the battery ceased functioning. Well, I decided it was time(!) to put a tentative toe into main - stream living again and take the bus into Norwich, to, among other pressing things, purchase a new one. I soon realized that 'spontaneity' is a thing of the past! Of course, we all must take great care to prevent infection rates rising again, but, in this context, the cost is going to be high in terms of the quality of socializing. The new 'landscape' is daunting to say the least! Suffice to say I was mightily relieved to get home again.

Some time ago I read this: "touch is the new taboo". I reflected on this as I warily negotiated my way through the city streets and into the shops. The 'touching' prohibition has been insidiously invading our social behaviour, under the guise of being Politically Correct, for quite a while: we have had to pause and judge the appropriateness of any tactile engagement. Thank heaven I left teaching before I

was prohibited from cuddling an injured child, helping with clothes changing for PE, or sitting a distressed child on my lap during story time. We all know the reasoning behind 'touch taboo', but let's think: what have we gained from this, balanced with what we have lost?

So many people, particularly those living on their own, are craving a touch, not only from their loved ones, but the simple gesture of greeting, a friendly "I've missed you" hug, a soothing massage to relieve pain, a fond ruffle of the hair, the clasp of a hand in solidarity, or a 'high five'. Gestures often speak louder than words. I am reminded of the time when I told a very elderly resident in a Care Home, who was friendly with my Mother-in-Law, also a resident of the Home, that she had died that night. She, sitting opposite me, simply and wordlessly, clasped both my hands in her very arthritic ones. I will never forget that gesture. It 'spoke' volumes.

Touching can signify reassurance, greeting, blessing, empathy – "I care" – comfort, affinity, solidarity, love, compassion – so many things, and many of us are currently lacking it. It is so fundamental to our human condition that we feel lost or incomplete, and are – consciously or unconsciously- mourning its loss. The gradual 'drip, drip' encroachment towards a 'touch taboo' environment has accelerated into a torrent, and we are, at last, recognizing the importance of 'touch' to mental and physical well-being. Is God telling us something here?

I got to thinking about how our Creator longs for intimate connection and relationship with us. He longs to 'touch' our lives. This is so well portrayed in Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling painting. (*see main picture*).

Touching has the power to heal. Jesus employs all the senses in his earthly ministry. I decided to compile an inventory of all the occasions he used 'touch' as an instrument of healing when he performed the healing miracles. (*see separate sheet below*). You might like to look up the references.

What is striking is the different ways Jesus uses 'touch' in each setting. There is no set procedure – he responds to the need of each individual in ways that are appropriate and meaningful for them and, prior to healing, he probes their

'condition of the heart' or motive, for wanting to be healed. In the case of the healing of blind Bartimaeus, just imagine - the first person you ever see after a lifetime of blindness is Jesus! What a 'wow' moment that must have been!

The 'new normal' is slowly beginning to emerge from the fog of lockdown. We don't know what lies ahead. The process is painful and scary. I'll have to get on that bus again and venture into the city before too long. We need to make space and really listen to what God is telling us in these testing times.

I'll leave you with four questions to ponder:

- *What things have you lost/missed during lockdown?*
- *What things have you gained?*
- *How have you 'grown'?*
- *What things are you going to celebrate and give thanks for?*

If you keep a prayer journal, it might be a good idea to record your thoughts (and God's reply!)

May the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge of his love, this day and always. Amen

Elaine

Man with leprosy	Matt 8:23	Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man	
Peter's mother with a fever	Matt 8: 15	He touched her hand and the fever left her.	
Woman with bleeding	Matt 9:20	She touched his robes in faith	
2 blind men	Matt 9: 29	He touched their eyes	
2 blind men at Jericho	Matt 20: 34	Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes	
Deaf & mute man	Mark 7: 33	Read it! Definitely a 'no no' for these times!	
Blind man at Bethsaida	Mark 8: 22	Ditto!	
Crippled woman	Luke 13: 13	Then he put his hands on her.	
At the garden of Gethsemene	Luke 22: 51	He touched the man's ear and he healed him.	
Man born blind	John 9	He put mud on the man's eyes.	