

A Touch and Go Situation Mathew 17: 1-9

There are times in life when we will experience things so amazing, so astonishing, so mysterious that they will remain embedded in our minds forever. One of the reasons that happens is that one or more of our senses were touched in a significant way. Sight, sound, smell, taste and touch control our mind and our bodies. Much like apps on a tablet or buttons on a telephone, our actions and our emotions are greatly influenced by our senses.

The human mind is directly connected to and at times controlled by one or more of our five senses. Seeing a magnificent painting, a rainbow or beautiful sunset in the sky can cause us to pause for a moment and reflect upon the goodness of God's grace. The smell of fresh popcorn in a movie theatre or shopping center can make us think we are hungry, even if we have just eaten a large meal. We often joke that Methodists know how to eat better than any other denomination and that is probably due to the inviting smells and tastes of the wonderful church meals that we enjoy in our fellowship halls from time to time. We can recognize certain places by their scent, even with our eyes closed. Catching a whiff of a certain brand of perfume or cologne may bring back memories of a special person or a special place long forgotten and buried deep in our mind. When our ears hear a special piece of music, the cries of a tiny baby or hurtful words spoken in anger our bodies will respond accordingly. We will remember angry words forever.

The fact is that our senses have a powerful influence over our minds and bodies. They cause us to respond or react in a physical and emotional way, and perhaps the sense of touch is the most significant. Dr. Gary Chapman, the author of the Five Love Languages teaches that physical touch is a universal love language, one of the most powerful ways we can demonstrate love to one another.

Think about that for a moment, especially when it comes to romance and intimacy. Our sense of touch is a powerful thing that will ultimately bring us much joy or much grief. The embrace of a friend or loved one during a crisis or difficult time often brings us comfort and security. A firm handshake or even a fist bump demonstrates a willingness to establish a new relationship or seal a business deal. It doesn't seem like it was that long ago that AT&T launched an advertising campaign that used the slogan "reach out and touch someone". It was meant to remind us that even though great physical distance might separate us we can keep in touch with each other in other ways. Even though that ad first aired forty-one years ago, it is still good advice and today it is easier to do than ever with so many means of communication right at our fingertips.

The first time Peter, James and John found themselves on a mountain with Jesus they were changed in a powerful way. It was on the mountain that they were commissioned to be His disciples, and their lives would never be the same. A year had now passed, and Jesus had taken them on some amazing journeys both on land and sea since then. Yet the best was still to come. When they climbed the mountain that day, they had no idea they would soon experience a once in a lifetime event that would once again change them forever. In an instant, the One who had walked the earth with them, doing human things like eating, talking and preaching suddenly became the visible presence of Almighty God. As far as Biblical mountaintop experiences go, it was right up there with the one Moses had when he met God on the cleft of Mt Horeb.

It was something that would remain imbedded in their minds for the rest of their lives. In a flash of light Moses and Elijah appeared before their very eyes. Even more amazing, they immediately knew who they were, even though they had died hundreds of years earlier. Then they saw Jesus, the One who first appeared to them as a human being like themselves, become transfigured or changed into a dazzling manifestation of the God of the universe. Perhaps they smelled the purity and tasted the holy sweetness in the air. There is no doubt they heard the voice of God. Three of the four Gospel writers recorded what they heard - "This is my Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.

Their sense of sight, smell, hearing and taste were deeply affected by the amazing things they experienced, and one word sums up their reaction. **Verse 7 reveals that they were overwhelmed with fear because of their encounter with the glorious Jesus.** The one they once saw as their friend and teacher, the one they once believed to be as human as themselves, was now in a dazzling white robe with a face shining like the sun. It was at that very moment that Jesus did something so unthinkable that it changed them forever. The holy of holies, the master and creator of the entire universe, reached out and touched them and said these words: “get up and do not be afraid”. **Their encounter with the holy, the glory of God, was not something Jesus wanted them to be afraid of.** It was something to equip and encourage them once they left the mountain.

In three days, we will officially begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday. Jesus is inviting each of us to take a six week journey with Him to a hill far away, a mountaintop if you will, and encounter the holy. Not only will He reach out and touch us like he did Peter, James and John and the other disciples but He will encourage us to be like Him and reach out and touch someone for the kingdom. As we learn to pray together during the coming weeks, no matter the distance between us, let us expect to feel the loving touch of Jesus once again. It may be in the form of an embrace or kiss from a brother or sister in Christ, the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit or perhaps some combination of the two. We shouldn't fear but expect to encounter the holy when we seek it. It is part of our human nature to desire a relationship with and be in the presence of the holy creator who loved us enough to give us life. **Love overcomes fear.**

Our encounter with the holy begins and ends at the cross of Christ. The best thing we have ever tasted, the sweetest sounds we have ever heard, and the most amazing sights we have ever seen will pale in comparison to the touch of Jesus, especially the one we will experience when we meet Him someday in person in glory. It is only by His grace that we will see and touch the glory of God-made manifest in His Son Jesus Christ- when we reach our destination. In the meantime, we will need to rely on that long-distance connection that Jesus has established through the Scriptures and the church. During this Lenten season and beyond, let us strain to hear the words of God, especially those spoken to us on the mountain so long ago. “This is my Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him. What a different world this would be if God's people obeyed. Amen