

Tiffany Montavon: Touch

Touch

Beloved people of God:

I have two things to tell you about. I know you know them, I am just reminding you:

We are beloved of God.

(as such, we can go through the hard honest stuff.)

Healing is possible.

Thomas may have been out getting food for Jesus' followers. He may have been saying prayers at the temple. In any case, he was not there when Jesus first appeared to the gathering disciples, and so he missed out. He did not receive the first blessing of Christ; he did not receive the first breath of Spirit.

Sometimes I feel like I did not quite get it, either.

I was taught this story as those who believe on faith alone, rather than a mystical experience with God, are better than those of us who need to feel God's presence tangibly.

In researching this scripture, I learned that several scholars agree that the writers of John's Gospel have Jesus say, "blessed are those who have not seen and believed" for the first Century church. The second generation of followers have not met Jesus; they only know the stories, and they are asked to believe on faith! Jesus' words here are meant as encouragement for those new believers. It has nothing to do with more faith or less faith. This is good news to me. Thomas opens the door wider for me, beyond the spiritual or

theological types.

It is important to know that Jesus honored Thomas' doubts and his need to touch... Jesus honored doubt. Jesus says, "Thomas, I love you. I am here with you. Touch me. I am yours." Thomas responds, as all people respond who know in their bones that they – with their questioning, with their demands, with their loyalty, with their hopes and fears – that God loves them: With joy and declarations of who God is!

How do you respond when God says, "touch me?"

Friends, believe the good news: we are the beloved of God.

During 1997 when I was caring for my mom who was dying of brain cancer, I had much anger. I walked nightly on the golf course out in the country, punching the air, breathing deeply. It was hard work. [Punch & breathe]

It took nine holes of punching and energetic walking to get clear enough to be present.

I now consider this my first experience of Body prayer:

Prayer is opening me to God's presence.

I had to clear enough anger to be open to God.

By the ninth hole, I began to feel physically, emotionally, a bit better. I could drink in the light of the Hale Bopp comet as a vision of God's love in that dark night sky. This body prayer was a healing prayer.

Often this was enough – I would turn around, call the dogs, and walk back home the same way we had just come. Yet, sometimes, I wanted to see some new terrain, feel new ground under my feet. If I walked the second nine holes, it required making a completely new commitment.

At the 10th hole, there was a gauntlet – a decision point, or a birth canal, in the woods. There was an area where the trees came together at the bottom of a hill. The path wound through the forest, but very soon, the trees covered over any light from the moon, or even the bright comet. It was pitch black in the woods, and I was scared. If I wanted to see new ground, go on a more exciting walk, I had to go through it. Most often, I turned back at that point.

If we want to see new land in Takoma Park, I wonder what we will have to pass through. Of what are we willing to let go? Following Thomas' example, can we say, "Here's what I need in order to trust that God is still with us?" More specifically, what power structures will have to change to allow newness? Whom will we have to learn to listen to, different from our comfort zone at 2025?

I wonder how the darkness, which we are certain to go through, will change us. As we walk forward, it is very important that each of us do the work necessary to get to the truth: we are the beloved of God, just as we are. In seeking new land, we must know this in our bones.

[sing]

Lay down the burden of your heart

I know you will never miss it.

Show Creator where it hurts,

And let Redeemer Lift it.

On this night, I was still heavy hearted at the ninth hole and needed more of the wildness of God's grace which I received on those dark walks. To see new ground, I had to pass through. Trembling, quiet, I prayed that I would feel Jesus' hand in mine as I went through. I literally held out my hand as I walked. It was very dark. I got through the passage. There was new life on the other side. However, I did not feel God's hand.

It was not until months later that I felt God's hand – in those who carried me in grief at my first [Faith At Work](#) event. I felt God again a few months after that in those who reached out to me (with a canoe ride, walks, and hugs) when I first showed up at Seekers; quite bedraggled. It was actually years before I could name that although I had not put my hand in Jesus side, and he had not put his hand in mine on that walk, that indeed these hands around me were the hands of God.

Friends, believe the good news: we are the beloved of God.

Sometimes, I still doubt. While God's love is important on a personal level, I doubt it makes much difference in the world. Hence, my actions make no difference in the world.

It is frankly easier to believe nothing good can happen.

It requires more energy to live with hope and to live a redemptive life.

Eli Weisel says, "The tragedy of the believer is greater than the tragedy of those who do not believe."

The question is "is healing possible?"

My task was to go through the darkness to the understanding that I am a beloved of God. It was the faithful communities' task to hold my hand until I could come to the understanding that these are God's hands, and healing is indeed possible.

Sometimes this work is too hard; the forest is too dark to walk through. On the days when I answer "no, healing is not possible," I must turn to community.

I have now been in two mission groups. What exciting cauldrons of God's grace! I have recently come to a stunning realization: I do not like every one in the group, and am certain that not everyone in the group likes me!

I need to spend a certain amount of energy figuring out the mirrors provided, the politics, the hidden agendas, the gender issues, the family of origin issues, my stuff, their stuff. It is important to do the relational work of community.

Yet after all that, the deepest truth may still be that I am the beloved, and they are the beloved. It is not about liking or disliking; it is about learning to and practicing loving each other deeply.

It does not matter if you disagree with the timing of the service at Carroll Street. It does not matter if you think there is not enough silence in worship, or if the kids are excluded more than included, or that so-and-so is acting out of self-interest. Are you acting from the knowledge that you are the beloved of God, and the person on your left or on your right or in front of you is as beloved as you are?

Yes friends, healing is possible. Our hands are Christ's hands, as we learn to love each other in new ways.

[Hold up prayer book]

Our prayer book is covered with hands to remind us: the creative tension is to put ourselves in God's hands through prayer ... and to be God's hands in the world.

Here are some hand actions:

Practice the work of community. (I have talked about what that looks like for me in mission group.)

Share the joy in your life. It is very important that we know each other's joy. (My women's circle ends with "share your joy!") I remind you of the song with which some of us grew up:

[Sing: I've got the joy, joy joy joy down in my heart]

Hug or touch each other often.

(sometimes uncomfortable... cheek kiss? Lip kiss? Work with it!

Touching each other – affirming each other is important!)

Make sure you are hearing of the good, healing work that is happening in the world. Find ways to choose this awareness. It will feed your own awakesness ...

As I learn more deeply that I am the beloved of God, and I embrace that healing is possible, I now find myself called to this motley crew of healers at Seekers Church called River of Light.

Since October when our call was confirmed, we have deepened our worship practice of silence. We have received each other's stories of hurt and healing; this is continuous work. We bump up against each other, and struggle to listen and to be heard. This too is continuous work. Out of this authenticity, we offer this prayer book, and move toward offering our monthly healing service.

Hear these words from our call:

We long to experience God's work of healing and reconciliation in and among us. We recognize there is a crucial link between individual healing and the healing of our communities that we call peacemaking, and commit to engaging both these aspects of healing.

We will practice turning toward hope, without turning from pain.

Friends, believe the good news: we are the Beloved of God, and healing is possible.