

Sermon: Touch Me and See

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, April 14, 2024)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Yes we are all witnesses to these things, of the resurrected Jesus appearing before a group of frightened disciples, pronouncing peace, saying, “Peace be with you.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we continue to reflect on the meaning of that peace, but through a different witness of the Gospel according to Luke. Although the accounts between John 20 of last week and Luke of this week appear to be quite similar, there are two distinct features recorded by Luke that are absent in John 20. First, Jesus invited the disciples to touch his wounds; second, Jesus was hungry and asked for food. There is something about Jesus being hungry, and asking for something to eat, that is quite endearing.

This past week has been somewhat challenging for me personally. I was already dealing with a terrible headache and discomfort in my inner ear. When I woke up Tuesday with a bit of a frozen lip on my left side, I realized something else serious was going on. I call my family doctor, and was fortunate enough to get an appointment that same morning. By the time she saw me, my facial paralysis was in full blown, and she called for an ambulance right away and checked me into the emergency department of Montfort. A battery of tests were subsequently done on me, ruling out a stroke (thank God!). But by 4 pm, I was hungry.

Don't get me wrong, I was very much appreciative of the medical care provided, but I only had a simple bite to eat earlier, and had gone, by then, 9 hours without any food or drink. I did ask a nurse for some nourishment but was only told to wait some more. Feeling quite disoriented, I texted Daisy, saying, “I am so hungry I could eat a Kenny”.

It was a silly South Park reference that she didn't quite get at first. Kenny was this cartoon character who gets killed in every episode, and who somehow comes back alive in the next. In one particular episode, the kids of South Park got stuck in an elevator. Panicking from their ordeal, and hungry after only a couple of hours of being trapped, they ended up eating Kenny. I know, I know, its brutal and silly. South Park, although being a

cartoon and extremely funny in a deadpan sense, is really not suitable for kids.

Anyway, that was running through my mind, feeling trapped on a hospital bed, waiting with no end in sight, and extremely hungry, enough to eat a Kenny. It was Justin, my eldest son, who came to the rescue, delivering to me a Chinese takeout, fried rice as I recall. I also recall when the emergency physician finally came to see me with a diagnosis, my mouth was full of fried rice. He told me to take my time, he understands.

Coming back to Jesus, there is something endearing about him feeling hungry and asking for food. By my simple calculation, the last meal Jesus had was during the Passover, the famous Last Supper, and that was at least four full days ago. And what an ordeal Jesus endured, according to the Apostles Creed, "He was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead." No wonder he was hungry. So he asked the gathered disciples, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

However, there is something else going on in that exchange. We know that, in the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was tempted by Satan and tested in the wilderness for forty days. When asked by the Accuser why he couldn't turn a stone into bread, Jesus replied, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, that "One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

We also know that, during his earthly ministry, Jesus did perform miracles, on two separate occasions of feeding the hungry masses. He did so by somehow turning measly ingredients, of five loaves and two fish, into sufficient nourishments to feed five thousand in one account (Mark 6), and four thousand in another account (Mark 8).

Furthermore, in his teaching, Jesus has a tendency to spiritualize the state of hunger, as in "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6) Jesus didn't need to ask for food, he is food as he declares in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

So why did Jesus ask for food in that locked room, before the gathered disciples? I believe, it has something to do with what theologians call it the 'incarnation', or God descended to humanity. Hold that thought a

bit more, we will come back to that. I want to turn to Jesus inviting the disciples to touch his wounds.

Have you ever wonder what an odd way Jesus greeted the disciples in that locked room—mainly he showed them his wounds, and invited them to touch and see. I don't recall ever greeting others, nor have I ever been greeted that way, revealing one's own wounds. Hi John, how are you? I am an alcoholic and a drug addict. Look at the needle marks on my inner thigh. Or, good morning Mary, I was beaten up badly by my husband last night. Look at these bruises on my back. Or, bon jour Peter, I am having a psychotic episode the past few days, and have been trying to kill myself. Touch these cut marks on my forearm.

Whether these wounds are self-inflicted or caused by others, wherever faults lie, our natural instinct is to hide it, perhaps ashamed by it, and certainly not to be revealed in greeting one another. But that was precisely what Jesus did. Peace be with you! Look at my wounds, touch me and see. It was as if these wounds of Christ is intimately connected to his peace.

As prophet Isaiah once wrote, mysteriously and beautifully, *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* (Isaiah 53:5) When Jesus took the sins of the world onto himself, and endured those insults and lashes, his wounds heal us. When Jesus died for us on the cross, his blood saves us. When Jesus was resurrected, came upon the fearful disciples in that locked room, greeted them and showed them his hands and side, his self-revealed vulnerability opened the way for them and for us to admit that we are all wounded, and that it was ok.

In that locked room, at that moment, something sacred happened. As if rich perfumed oil came upon their head and dripped down the side of their beard. As if the heaven opened, and spring rain pour forth onto Mount Zion. Peace of Christ came upon the disciples! As Jesus said elsewhere, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (John 14:27)

Earlier I brought up the theology of ‘incarnation’, of God descended on humanity. That understanding is most beautifully described in the opening verse of the Gospel of John, of *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* And jumping to verse

14, “*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.*” God came down to us, in the form of the Son, *homoousio*, the Greek term to describe ‘same substance, different person’.

While the Western Christianity seem to focus primarily on the ontological debate of incarnation, the Eastern Christian theologians, such as Gregory Palamas—a Byzantine Greek theologian—took a different path. One of the most fundamental insights of eastern Christian writers is that God descended to humanity in order that humanity might ascend to God. The central theme is that of the incarnation. God assuming human flesh is viewed as both divine descent and human ascent. God descends to where we are, in order to raise us to where God is. For such writers, salvation is primarily to be thought of in terms of *theosis* (becoming divine) or *theopoiesis* (being made divine).

Somehow, that thought sustained me during the past week, as I struggled with my infirmity, my disorientation, now contorted face, and as I prepared to preach the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Knowing that I am but a lump of clay in the hand of my potter, ready to be reshaped by my maker (Jeremiah 18:4). Knowing also that we are all just clay jars, but we have this treasure in us, that is Christ Jesus as God descended on us, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us (2 Corinthians 4:7). Most importantly of all, despite our physical infirmity, or perhaps in spite of it, Jesus will one day raise us to where God is, where ‘they will hunger no more and thirst no more’; where ‘mourning and crying and pain will be no more, as God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and Death, the finally enemy be defeated, will be no more. (Revelation 7, 21)

In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**