

1 Sermon, July 14, 2013

Texts: 1 Samuel 18:1-4, Mark 6:56, Luke 7:36-50

Title: "Touch and Sharing"

Main Idea: God wants us to be intimate through touch and sharing

1. Intro
2. Touch is something that can be sacred or hurtful
3. Intimacy – touch and sharing
4. God desires intimacy
 - Bride of Christ
 - Woman of the City
5. Intimacy does not have to be connected to sex

1. Intro

It was early August, and aunt Megan came to visit her little baby niece. It was the first time she had seen her niece, and it felt like there was an instant bond. The moment Megan held her and looked into her eyes there seemed to be nothing else in the world. This was what it was all about. Megan wanted that moment to last forever.

It was late September when Emil and Agnes went to their lake cabin to close up for the season. In the cool of the evening, without words, they both wandered outside and looked across the lake at the sunset sky. Without thinking, their hands met and clasped. They held hands in silence for at least five minutes before they sighed and went inside.

It was mid-October when the football team was out on the field. In the last minute, T.J. threw the ball, Weston caught it, and ran it into the end zone. That touchdown won a game against a team that had seemed unbeatable. The whole team became a confused mass of high-fives, belly-bumps and back slaps. There were no words to express the joy of this communal victory – the feeling needed some kind of physical expression of what it meant to beat the odds together.

It was the weekend after Thanksgiving when all the family gathered around Eunice in her hospice room. She knew it was the end. Everyone else did, too. There were no secrets. One by one, the family held her hand, hugged her, told her they loved her. They prayed the Lord's Prayer together, all holding hands. It was a sacred time.

2 Sermon, July 14, 2013

You could say they held onto each other for dear life – because the holding onto each other was life-giving. Touching each other was not about death. It was about life.

Touch. God made us to touch each other. All the kinds of touch I've talked about – the hand holding, fist bumping, hugging, holding – all of these can be extremely intimate touch.

Intimate touch is important in deep relationships.

Intimate touch includes but is not limited to touch that happens in the privacy of the bedroom.

Jesus said 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' (Matthew 19:5, NRSV)

That joining and becoming one flesh is a sacred thing. That kind of intimacy can deepen relationships and increase love.

People wanted to touch Jesus. Just touch his clothing. I think that came from the same desire for intimacy, the same desire to be close to the one who was loved. People came to Jesus to be healed, but they wanted more than just a physical cure. They wanted wholeness; they wanted to be well spiritually and physically. They wanted to be united to the love they saw in Jesus.

Jesus touched people. Whether he held children in his lap, or touched them to heal them, or washed the feet of the disciples, Jesus touched people.

2. Touch is something that can be sacred or hurtful

Touch can be a sacred thing. Touch can change how we feel. This can be a wonderful thing, or it can be a destructive thing.

You've experienced both kinds of touch: on one hand you've experienced touch that makes you feel more connected, and better about yourself.

You've also experienced touch that was angry, or intended to threaten or harm, and made you feel worse about yourself. You've experienced touch that had no love in it. Perhaps you've experienced touch that left you feeling dirty.

3 Sermon, July 14, 2013

What's the difference between these types of touch?

Much of the difference is in the desire of the one doing the touching. If they desire your good, then the touch is good – usually.

But it is even more important how the one being touched feels about it. If the one being touched doesn't want to be touched, no kind of touch will feel good.

3. Intimacy – touch and sharing

Let me come at this from a different direction.

The stories I told at the beginning of the sermon were about touch that reflected an intimacy, a connection already present in those who were giving and receiving touch. Whether between an older couple or a football team or an aunt with a baby – the touch speaks of a deeper relationship.

This kind of relationship is what God wants for us. God wants relationships where people are free to share and rejoice and mourn with each other. Most of the Psalms are community celebrations and laments where people join together in expressing their feelings.

That's what the Bible talks about when it says the Church is the Bride of Christ. Christ is in a giving and taking relationship with the church. It's a committed relationship, a growing relationship.

When I was in seminary, one of my former roommates had a very intimate way of praying. He was an African-American Baptist preacher who came by it out of his tradition. When he prayed from the pulpit you knew that this was a conversation he was having with God. He expressed his deepest hopes and desires and even pain and asked to be closer and more faithful. It was really beautiful the way he prayed.

That's the kind of relationship that God wants us to have with each other, too – a relationship of sharing; of emotional give and take.

One of the few examples of this kind of relationship in the Bible is that of David and Jonathan. We read that Jonathan loved David as his own soul. This passage shows us the affection that Jonathan had for David, so much so that he gave David all his military clothing, and even his own sword, and his own bow. In a warrior society, that's a real

4 Sermon, July 14, 2013

sacrifice. We know, too, that Jonathan protected David from Jonathan's father, King Saul. Jonathan allowed David to go into hiding when Saul was angry.

Another example is what John tells us cryptically about the Disciple that Jesus loved. Tradition says it's John, some say it's Lazarus – but in the Gospel of John, one of the disciples is singled out. Perhaps even Jesus needed someone to confide in at the end of the day, someone to be especially close to. We can only guess why the Gospel of John tells us that there was a disciple that Jesus loved; we can only guess at what this meant.

Another example of this is the Woman of the City from today's reading from Luke. This woman of the city had many sins, Jesus said. She was not among the elite. She did not have the leisure to follow the letter of the Hebrew law. That in itself would make her a sinner – if she couldn't go to the Temple three times a year and make an offering.

But this woman, who was likely quite poor, brought some expensive ointment and barged into a gathering of men. It was against custom; she would not have been welcome, but she went anyway, and while crying rubbed the ointment into Jesus' feet. She touched Jesus in a very intimate way, and did the job of a servant, caring for his feet. Yet it was so much more than what a servant would do. Normally, a servant would not use ointment, just wash and dry the feet. This unnamed woman treated Jesus as precious to her with the expensive ointment.

Jesus praised the woman for what she did and said that she loved much. She would receive forgiveness, because she loved much.

4. Willing to receive touch

Jesus was willing to receive this woman's touch, so it was a blessing. If he had not been willing, it would have been wrong to touch his feet. If he had not been willing to receive her touch, she would have been sent away, rejected once again.

So our touch ought to reflect the willingness of the person to receive. In other words, there really needs to be a desire to be in relationship on the part of both persons. Then touch becomes a blessing.

If you're ready for it, a hug can lower your blood pressure, make you feel you belong, and change your day.

5 Sermon, July 14, 2013

The people you hug most often are the ones you have the deepest relationship with.

5. Intimacy does not have to be connected to sex

Intimacy and touch can be a God-given blessing.
And intimacy can be but does not have to be a sexual thing.

In fact, in Bible times and in many parts of the world today, the marriage bond is one of loyalty and commitment, but spouses do not become best friends to each other. The deepest friendships are ones with one's peers of the same gender.

In Paul's letters in the New Testament, it says several times: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." That probably would have been something like what the Russians do. It's an intimate greeting, but not a sexual thing.

God designed us for intimacy, to share with each other, to bear one another's burdens and to rejoice with each other.

"And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed." Mark 6:56, NRSV.

"When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt." (1 Samuel 18:1-4, NRSV.)

David and Saul finished talking, and soon David and Jonathan became best friends. Jonathan thought as much of David as he did of himself. **2** From that time on, Saul kept David in his service and would not let David go back to his own family. **3** Jonathan liked David so much that they promised to always be loyal friends. **4** Jonathan took off the robe that he was wearing and

6 Sermon, July 14, 2013

gave it to David. He also gave him his military clothes, [b] his sword, his bow and arrows, and his belt. (1 Samuel 18:1-4, CEV)

"One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him--that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:36-50, NRSV.