

REACH OUT AND TOUCH

October 25, 2009

The last time I was given the opportunity to share a message for the service here at The Garden the theme was based upon the opening monologue for a Saturday Night Live sketch where Tina Fey told us that "We Could Do It". And this morning the service is loosely based upon a 1980's commercial from AT&T that tells us to "Reach Out and Touch Someone". I apparently have to quit watch so much TV and get outside and play more. I'm sure that most of you at some point in your lives have heard the phrase from someone that something is as familiar as the back of their hand. But really how familiar is the back of your hand? Now might be a good time for the audience participation part of the service. Let's take a minute and everyone hold out your hand and take a good hard look at the back of your hand. Does it seem familiar? I guess that since we see it all day long I suspect that the back of our hand is pretty familiar. Now, flip it over. Look at the inside of your hand. Maybe not quite as familiar because you're not always looking at it or even thinking about it. Take a look at the ends of your fingers. Do you see your curly, swirly fingerprints. These are yours and yours alone and are completely unique and special, one of a kind and they are also those little things that give the CSI crew something to dust for at crime scenes.

Now visualize with me for just a moment a documentary on the development of the human hand...and maybe start from when we were very, very young until when we're very, very old. As a baby we would start by reaching out our hand in search of love and comfort and maybe reassurance that we're OK. Then as we grow a little bit older we use our hand to grasp onto things to help us eat and get nourishment. Then maybe we use it to hold on to things to steady ourselves as we walk. And then as we become very old, it seems that the same sequence of development and use of our hands happens, but only in reverse. And then in between as we grow up and live life, there are times that we use our hand to interact with others either through a handshake, a thumbs up or maybe in a fist to defend ourselves or raising our hand to ask a question and learn something. Or maybe even Reaching Out and Touching Someone with compassion and caring.

I remember when Sandi and I were first dating in college and walking down one of the sidewalks at Purdue, side by side. Then reaching out with my hand and taking hold of hers...and having that incredible feeling of touch and closeness...and then the amazing feeling of her holding my hand right back. It's times like these that are unforgettable, where our hand is directly connected to our heart and our soul. Even today as Sandi and I walk together and the weather gets colder, I reflect on one of the best gifts I've ever received. It was a pair of smittens, yes smittens. Now Smittens consists of two pairs of mittens but one of the pairs is connected as one so then each person has a single mitten on the outside hand and then puts their other hand inside the common mitten so you can still hold hands as you walk down the sidewalk. I tell you, the advances of modern technology never cease to amaze me.

As we talk about hands and touching, the scripture for this morning provides a pretty vivid illustration. The passage is found in the New Testament in the Book of Luke, in the 5th chapter beginning with the 12th verse. And here it tells us that...

Jesus came to town where there was a man who had leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he knelt down to the ground in front of Jesus and begged, "Lord, you have the power to make me well if only you want." Jesus put his hand on him and said, "I want to! Now you are well!" At once the man's leprosy disappeared.

In this story Jesus is approached by a man with leprosy. Leprosy in those times was a terrible disease. Lepers were considered untouchables. As a matter of fact, lepers were forbidden to have contact with the community and needed to wear all black clothing and if anyone came close to them, they were required to yell out "Unclean!" so that people wouldn't come and touch them or be in contact with them. The scripture tells that this man was in the latter stages of leprosy so he's apparently had it for several years. When you first get leprosy, you are more or less banished from the community. This means that you can't go near anyone else whether it be your family, your children, your friends, loved ones, anyone. You are left completely on your own. One can only imagine the loneliness and despair and self-loathing that comes with this in addition to having to deal with the pain of the disease.

Here was a leper who was clearly considered an untouchable but still he approached Jesus with faith in his heart. We learned just a few weeks ago here at The Garden, on World Communion Sunday, that Jesus typically sat and spent time with the undesirables and sinners as well as outcasts of society. As this scripture tell us, the leper knelt down on the ground in front of Jesus and Jesus immediately put his hand out and touched him.

I believe that Jesus instantly had compassion towards this man and wanted to Reach Out and Touch him. At the same time as Jesus touched the man, I believe that this leper felt the love and compassion that he had missed and longed for for so many years...and that he truly received this touch and love from another person, Jesus. We too can be those healing hands of compassion as Jesus was, to someone we see or know who seems removed from others and feels unwanted. It may be someone new to your school, your office or your neighborhood. Or it may be someone who feels detached because of a broken relationship, an illness or a perceived failure on their part. They too as the leper are feeling untouchable.

Probably one of the most renowned modern day figures who exhibited compassion and care for the poor and undesirables, is the Nobel Prize winner, Mother Theresa. I would expect that we are all familiar with the dedication and genuine desire that she had to minister and care for the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. Because of her prominence, most of the things that she said were written down because people truly turn to her for inspiration and for purpose. One of the things that she said was that *"The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted."* She goes on to say, *"Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the grace we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the hard work."* Truly, here is a woman who gets it and has also experienced the effect of her touch and compassion for others.

As an engineer I would also like to point out that there is also scientific and empirical information that substantiates the power and the effect of human touch. There was a study performed in 1975, the year I graduated, by Dr. Jeffrey Fisher

with the Department of Psychology at the University of Connecticut titled, "Hands Touching Hands - Affective and Valuable Effects of an Interpersonal Touch." In addition to having a very impressive title, the study found that the response to human touch was uniformly positive. There have also been studies that show on a molecular level that with just the placing of a hand on someone else's shoulder and increasing the pressure slightly, that their respiration changes and their muscles relax and a general feeling of security occurs.

There is a well-known system of healing touch called Reiki which creates feelings of deep relaxation and inner peace. This ancient system was first used by Tibetan monks over 3,000 years ago. It was recently rediscovered in the mid 1800's by a Japanese monk educator and is used to help provide holistic, non-invasive and life affirming feelings and fulfillment within people. Even more recently, based upon these ancient systems, a complimentary medical system called Healing Touch has been developed by a nurse in 1989. Healing Touch is a way to assist the body's natural healing process. It is estimated that today, over 30,000 medical nurses use this same technique to reduce tension and anxiety and to help promote healing in the bodies and minds of patients. As a matter of fact, the word heal comes from the Old English word haelen which also means to make whole. We can see that healing involves restoring the balance of the person's mind, body and soul. I believe that it is through this process of touch that we can share God's love and God's presence in us. Each one of us can do this by Reaching Out and Touching others with our hands.

I personally experienced this several weeks ago as I was preparing for the message by researching the internet and Bible and digging up all kinds of information on touch. As I did this I felt that there was truly something meaningful in our touch and that there could be a connection with God. It was a Monday night when we were at home with our little dog Teddy. Teddy's a 12 year old Shih Tzu we got on Christmas when he was a fluffy little puppy. For the week or so before Teddy had pneumonia and had been really sick. We had taken him to the vet several times and we were feeding through a tube to help him get stronger and he was getting better. Then that evening he was having a very difficult time breathing and

collapsed. We could see that he was truly suffering. We called the vet who we had just seen the day before. She told us to bring him in to the hospital. During the time we were getting things ready, we put Teddy on his pillow to help make him comfortable. It was then that I reflected on all that I'd been studying and turned to God through prayer and asked God to use me, to use my hand to touch and to give comfort to Teddy. I put my hand on Teddy and he noticeably changed and relaxed. His breathing was no longer labored. I too felt a change and a connection to my heart. We carried him down to the car to take him to the hospital. On the way, our little dog passed away with the loving hands of our family on him.

I truly believe from my life experiences that through the mere touch with our hands we can share God's love and affect the lives of others. And all we have to do is Reach Out and Touch Someone. And on the other hand if there is ever a time that you are feeling separated or unwanted and have the opportunity to receive a loving touch from someone, please accept it. And then in time, turn around and share that same love through touch with someone else. It is through this way, that this world can be a better place.

CLOSING

In closing, I'd like to share one further remark from Mother Theresa. "*Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness.*" I would like to add to that by saying that when we don't Reach Out with our Hands and Touch the Lives of Others with the love of God, the world and we are both diminished. As we leave here today, know that God's love is within each one of us. And this week, make an effort to Reach Out and Touch Someone in need and I also ask that you personally share that experience with me sometime.

Thank you for making time this morning to be part of The Garden.

SERVICE FLOW

Song - Sweet Caroline

Video – Step Brothers

Song - Hand to Hold w/Video

Welcome/Set-Up

Video – The Soloist

Song – Touch Untouchables

Prayer

Video – AT & T commercial

Message

Song - Reach Out and Touch w/Video

Close