

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 John 1:1–2:2**

### **Sermon: The Perfect Touch**

The Sunday after Easter takes us to Thomas's confession. Christ alive, physically standing before Thomas, inviting his doubting disciple to touch him, reverses the refusal to believe the bodily resurrection. The Epistle from 1 John has many themes: life, fellowship, proclaiming the Christian message, the incarnate Word, and the necessity of Christ for all of these. The specific focus, however, is on the resurrected Christ as seen and heard, but especially as someone who touches and can be touched.

Picture a delivery room. A new mom has just given birth to her first child. The young son is placed in her arms. She holds the baby close. She reaches down and taps his nose, squeezes his cheek, lets the baby curl his tiny fingers around her index finger. There's something about just the right touch. It says, "I love you." It communicates closeness, assurance, comfort, warmth, and happiness.

Touch tells us that the other person is alive, real, there—and so are we. We need just the right touch, to touch and be touched in just the right way. Research shows that children who grow up without much touch—abandoned, left alone for much of the time—grew at a slower rate, were sicker, had trouble socially, and displayed more angry and depressed emotions.

It doesn't stop after we grow up. When we meet that special someone, we want to hold hands, caress a cheek, put our arms around each other, sit close. The front seats of cars now are probably much safer than when we were teenagers. But back then, when we were going out, our date could sit right next to us, close enough to touch each other.

We need just the right touch, to touch and be touched in just the right way. The right kind of touch says love, assurance, closeness, comfort, happiness. Touch says the other person is there, alive, real—and so are you. We also need just the right touch, to touch and be touched in just the right way by God. And we are.

The Church has a special word to describe when God could touch and be touched. Incarnation. God came to earth and took on human flesh and blood. When the Virgin Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, she gave birth to Jesus, fully divine, but also fully human. Jesus was someone she could touch. Yes, when Mary touched Jesus, tapped his nose, squeezed his cheek, let him curl his tiny fingers around her index finger, she was touching God and he was touching her. God became flesh and dwelt among us. People saw him. They heard him. They touched him. Incarnation—because we need to be touched in just the right way, not just by each other, but especially by God.

We can picture scenes from Jesus' ministry where he touched and was touched: blessing the children (Luke 18:16), placing mud on the eyes of the man born blind (John 9), the woman touching his cloak (Luke 8:43–48), washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1–11).

We have a God who became flesh and dwelt among us to touch and be touched in just the right way. John says people could see Jesus, listen to him, and touch him with their hands. Jesus is God incarnate, and his touch says love, closeness, warmth, assurance, joy. His touch says he is alive, real, and there—and so are we.

This is why leprosy was such a devastating disease in biblical times. While it encompasses a variety of skin diseases, leprosy also destroys the nerve endings so the person can't feel anything. You lose the sense of touch. Even worse, you were banished from the community. No one could touch you or even come near you. You became untouchable and lost the love and warmth, the closeness and joy that came with touch. Were you still alive and real? It didn't seem so.

It still happens, this loss of touch and being touched. An abandoned child. A child left alone for hours on end. A child who isn't held or doesn't have a lap to sit on while listening to a book. A marriage gone bad. No touches of love. No secret hand squeezes. No caress of the cheek or big old bear hugs.

But the most devastating loss of touch in this life is death. Sometimes families will stay in the hospital room after someone has died. You can still touch but the deceased has gone cold and can't touch back.

I can remember my mother's face just before she died. She died in 1980, I held her hand and she smiled never opening her eyes. The touch of a loved one and the touch of God as he takes your hand and leads you home.

The most horrific loss of touch is when we no longer can touch God, or he no longer touches us in just the right way. We call that hell. Sure, the endless fires sound bad, but the loss of touch, the total separation from God, means no love, warmth, closeness, assurance, joy. No right touch. What a frightening eternity that would be.

So, God becomes incarnate. He becomes flesh and blood. And his blood purifies us from everything that would keep us from touching him now and forever. On the cross, Jesus takes on this most devastating loss of touch. He cries out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus no longer touches his Father in heaven. His Father is no longer touching him. Devastating. Frightening. Horrific. But Jesus is taking death and hell at their worst, the loss of touch with God, so that we could touch and be touched by God forever.

Then he rises from the dead. We say that because he lives, we, too, shall live. We also can say that we touch because he touches.

Remember Thomas, doubting Thomas. He wasn't there when Jesus first appeared risen from the dead. He wouldn't believe unless he touched Jesus. A week later, Thomas is with the disciples. Jesus appears. He speaks to Thomas. ***“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side”*** (John 20:27). Just the right touch, as Thomas says, ***“My Lord and my God!”*** (v 28).

We, too, need to touch and be touched by Jesus in just the right way. In our Baptism, the sign of the cross is made on our foreheads and hearts. The water touches our head and rolls down the cheek. Jesus is there.

Just as he welcomed the little children, he is blessing anyone who comes to him in that refreshing water. At the baptismal font, we touch and have been touched by Jesus in just the right way.

Or we come up to the altar. Here we see and touch Jesus once again. He has promised to be in that piece of bread, that sip of wine. His body; his blood. Not a cold statue, but the real, living Jesus. Right there. Flesh and blood. Among us. Touching us. Us touching Jesus. In that Sacrament, Jesus is close, saying, “I love you.” He is giving assurance, comfort, and joy as he purifies us from all sin. He is real, present, and alive—and so are we when we touch that bread and wine, that body and blood.

We need just the right touch, to be touched in just the right way by Jesus. We need the greetings and handshakes, the hugs and holds. We need the blessings and water. We need the bread and wine. We need to touch and to be touched by Jesus now in this life and also face-to-face, just like Thomas did, in eternity.

We will. One day we, too, will have the joy and wonder of touching Jesus just as Thomas did. His resurrection says our hope is that touch and being touched will not end at the grave but will be ours once again on the Last Day and for all eternity. The leper, the abandoned child, the brokenhearted, the grieving parents, the son who remembers—we need just the right touch, to be touched in just the right way. Jesus' incredible gift to us is that we are, and we will.

Amen