

Sunday 21st April 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Imagining with our senses.

You might like to light a scented a candle as you reflect this morning. Or perhaps have a flower in a vase, or choose some quiet music to listen to before you start. Think about something you find comforting to the touch, or a favourite taste.

Today we think about how our senses play a part in our experience of God. Everyday we use our senses without giving it much thought but they are an important aspect of our lives and often it is not until we lose a sense that we truly appreciate that. Think for a moment of how many times you have used sight, hearing, touch, smell or taste this morning, and how different your experience would have been without one of them.

Reflective reading – [John 12:1-8 \(NRSV\)](#)

Read John 12.1-8 through three times. As you read think about:

1. How many senses were involved in the story?
2. What did Jesus' feet feel like?
3. What colour was Judas' shirt?

Notes

Touch was an intrinsic part of Jesus' healing ministry and here we read of him receiving a ministry of touch. When we visit someone elderly we can offer this same ministry with a hand massage, elderly people often feel bereft of touch. If appropriate a nice melling hand cream could be used. We could something in season and tasty to share.

Often we are ashamed of our feet and the idea of someone washing them, or anointing them fills us with dread but we can also find it difficult to massage our own feet with moisturiser, this can be a part of a healing ministry if we can let someone do this for us. Our bodies are a part of creation and we should not feel ashamed of them, they are the mechanism through which we use our senses and through which we sense God.

If Judas was a thief as has been suggested, he would have had money and may have used it to buy expensively coloured clothes.

There is a story about a young girl drawing a picture, she is concentrating really hard and her mum asks her what she is drawing. Without hesitation she replies that she is drawing God. Her mother replies that no one knows what God looks like and the daughter replies, but they will when I have finished! Perhaps you remember having a picture of God when you were a child, reflect on how that picture might have changed and why. As we get older maybe it becomes more difficult to imagine God. Perhaps we need to sense God more.

There are many stories in the bible about Jesus healing blindness, and we now understand these to be the gospel writer's analogies for the way Jesus revealed God. Mark, though, has a particularly significant story.

Read [Mark 8:22-26 \(NRSV\)](#)

²⁴And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking."

Why did he not see clearly? Why did he not see Jesus, as others saw him?

There are two stages to this healing, if the man had been blind since birth he had only seen trees through touch, imagination and experience, likewise he had only seen people through touch, imagination and experience. So, Jesus opens his eyes and his sight is based on his previous experience. Then Jesus touches him again and he sees more clearly. The first

seeing is perhaps like our first experience of seeing God, it is quite book based, it is other people's experience, and then as we engage with God through creation our eyes are opened to our own revelation of God and we share what 'we see'.

Imagine the scene of that healing story:

He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village – imagine them walking hand in hand, Jesus leading the man, were they talking? Did the blind man ask Jesus what he could see, what the scenery looked like? Did they talk of the ruts in the road caused by carts, of the sky that stretched into the distance, of the light, of the way the sun glistened on water, the leaves on the trees.

and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' – the question comes as a shock, reminding him of his mother asking the same question, of the voices of boys as they threw stones at him, taunting him, and his own voice in the dark of the night.

And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' – he had felt trees with their tall trunks and the branches that came from the sides, he had felt the shape of the olives on those high branches, and in the breeze he had sensed the leaves like fluttering fingers. He had brushed against people, felt their height, maybe even felt their face and found their eyes, their mouths, maybe felt their touch. The two experiences converge as he opens his eyes and sees through experience.

Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. – as we look more carefully we see things differently, we see for ourselves and not through experience and our eyes are opened to God.

Take a moment to consider:

1. How many hymns can you think of that mention a sense?
2. How does the commercial world use our senses? List as many different ways as possible. Now compare how we might use our senses in our Christian life.
3. Senses often trigger memory, can you think of something sensory that triggers a memory for you?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 2.14-16, what might it mean to be the aroma of Christ?

Read [Luke 8:40-56 \(NRSV\)](#)

Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a crowded place, what does it feel like?

People rub against you, there is noise all around, voices mingling but you sense one voice above the others and you try to listen to that one, cutting out the other noise. A man, anxious about his sick daughter, asking for help, asking the man to come, he calls him Jesus. Jesus agrees to see the daughter and you sense him move and the crowd moves. Everyone is curious and they follow Jesus like a river flowing downstream. You are swept along in the flow. Suddenly the crowd stops, you bump into someone.

Jesus has stopped and asks – who touched me, someone touches my clothes, and you think to yourself that lots of people have touched your clothes in the crowd around you. Then you hear Jesus say 'someone touched me and the power has gone from me' – what a strange thing to say you think. The crowd parts and a woman steps forward, she is dressed in black clothes, she looks weary and is hunched over as if in pain, almost kneeling and you hear her say in a nervous voice – it was me, I touched you, I have been ill for years and life has flowed from me in continual bleeding but I knew you could heal me but I did not think you would speak to me so I touched your hem and I felt it, I felt the healing. Forgive me.

Jesus kneels beside her and takes her hand, he speaks quietly to the woman and then he helps her up, and she stands straight and slowly walks away.

As you watch the crowd again parts and a man appears, rushing towards the man with the sick daughter. He gives bad news, the girl it seems had died, there is no need now for Jesus. You expect the crowd to leave but then Jesus says 'don't worry, she will be well and he begins the journey again, and the crowd move forward, with you still in the middle. You reach a house, it is a grand house and you see Jesus and three men enter. The crowd push forward but they do not enter the house, everyone waits expectantly. You move quietly and find yourself at a window, you look inside. Jesus is next to bed and there is a girl lying on the bed, she is absolutely still and her eyes are closed. You see Jesus reach out and touch her, he speaks quietly to her and she opens her eyes, then sits up. Holding her hand Jesus helps her from the bed and then she rushes to her parents and hugs them and you hear Jesus suggest they give her something to eat. With tears in their eyes then nod, and Jesus leaves the house and is once more swallowed up in the crowd.

Touch is an important aspect of the ministry of Jesus, particularly touching those whom society deemed untouchable.

Prayer

Creator God, you give us senses with which to savour life to the full.

When you looked at the new-created world and saw that it was good, you showed that you meant us to see beauty in all things and all people; and when Jesus singled out Bartimaeus the beggar and made him see again we remember we are called to look upon others and see the real person underneath.

You *hear* the cries of your people and call us to hear not just those who please but those also who disturb us; and as when Jesus said to the deaf man, 'Ephphatha', you open our ears not just to hear sounds but also the silence beyond.

Your creation is a multi-sensual place and we are surrounded by *smells* every day reminding us of the essence of life and that all aspects of life are a part of creation; and as when the house was filled with the aroma of precious ointment as the woman anointed Jesus we are called to a life of generosity and sharing rather than self-seeking.

As we live we rub up against others and as you wrestled with Jacob till dawn and *touched* his thigh, so you bless us as much during the struggle as when at peace; and as when the woman touched the hem of Jesus' garment, so we learn that we do not touch for taking but for healing.

You call us to *taste* life, to enjoy life as an offering and to respect life by only taking what we need and leaving enough for others to taste and enjoy, and as when Jesus shared the bread and wine with his disciples, we are reminded of the hope of the kingdom when we eat together and the oneness of creation, a celebration of senses.

Creator God, as we journey through life may we be aware of our learning through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, and understand how each experience is part of the oneness which you call us to recognise and celebrate.

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