

After my call with the Bishop this week I found myself living in what Susan Beaumont calls a “liminal season.”¹ In her book, “How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going,” Susan describes a liminal season as both “disorienting” and “exciting.”² I felt disoriented because I care so much and about all of you and it will be hard for me to leave you, but it is exciting because I feel I will get to fully live into where God is calling me to go next.

I found hope this week in Susan’s words: “God’s greatest work occurs in liminal space.”³ I believe this to be true today and that this is also what God teaches us in the Bible. What is beautiful about the God we serve is that God meets us in ways that we can touch, feel, and understand. God meets us in the liminal spaces and makes God’s presence known to us.

In Genesis 2 we see that God touched the dust of the earth and breathed life into humanity. Our relationship with God began with touch. This is the only time in creation God touched. God spoke everything else into existence, but with humanity it was more intimate. God continues to touch us and breathe life into us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This same God sent us Jesus Christ, someone we could touch and see so that we would believe. We find Jesus today after his resurrection spending time with his disciples. He allowed them to touch him and see that he had been resurrected. Then he even took the time to sit down and eat a simple meal with them.

It may seem strange to us and even stranger to the disciples that Jesus would request something to eat. Do you need to eat when you start your resurrected life? Why was this moment so important for the disciples?

God’s greatest gift to us in Jesus Christ was his ability to relate to people. He walked with his disciples, he shared meals with people, and he felt the full range of emotions of life. He rejoiced in the happy times and grieved with others in times of sadness. In this moment of sharing a meal and fellowship with the disciples, commentary teaches us that Jesus ate with them to prove that he was not a ghost, but that he was in fact alive.⁴

There was still a lot of doubt and fear among the disciples, and they were not sure if Jesus really did rise from the dead. They thought that Jesus was a ghost, or an angel or an apparition. Jesus did everything he possibly could to assure them and their senses that he was real.

In this moment Jesus and the disciples were in a liminal season. This was a moment that would not last forever as Jesus would ascend to heaven and the disciples would be commissioned to share the good news of Christ. But, if only for a moment, the disciples shared a meal with the resurrected Christ and the power of God triumphed the fear of liminality.

This past year we have all been living in a liminal time. A time where we feel in some ways time has stopped and we have been unable to move forward. Because of these feelings of uncertainty we may not have been able to feel the presence of God as strongly as we had before.

God continues to lead us beyond this season of liminality into a moment of reclaiming who we are as the body of Christ. Our three churches have survived the pandemic intact. Now it is time for us to leave the comfort of our new normal to continue to do the work of God.

In this moment of Scripture, I am sure there were so many disciples who did not want to leave this meal with Jesus. They wanted this moment to last forever, but if Jesus did not leave how could they move forward and be witnesses?

At this time in the life of the church we are called to look at the lessons we have learned over this past year to see how they have strengthened us for such a time as this.

- 1) We learned that church could happen anywhere. Even though we love our sanctuaries we learned the Christ comes to meet us where we are even in our pajamas at home.
- 2) We learned that we could still care for each other from afar. We were still able to reach out and communicate with each other in new ways. We were still able to pray for each other.
- 3) We learned that we could still study the Bible together. We were able to do the Bible studies over zoom.
- 4) We learned that the body of Christ was generous as we continued to meet our budgetary needs.
- 5) We learned that God continued to work before us, with us and in spite of us. God continued to comfort those who were grieving even during these difficult times.

All these lessons strengthened us and taught us new things, but most of all I think we were all missing something. We were missing God’s touch in our sanctuaries, and the touch from the body of Christ.

Touch is powerful. It is how Christ brought people healing and even some back from the dead. It is what led the disciples to believe in the risen Christ. It is how we pray with one another and commission those who are being sent out. Christ’s touch is how we continue to carry on the mission and ministry in the church today.

But how can we continue this ministry when we still can’t touch each other?

Even though we cannot yet embrace one another we can be part of Christ’s embrace in our community. This coming week Meggan Abboud will be leading the women’s Bible study at Sperryville. All our churches are invited, and we are also opening this event to the community that they may feel Christ’s healing touch.

We are also hoping to do outreach and fellowship events at our other churches this summer to show Christ’s love and presence to the community. Christ’s touch takes on many different forms and perhaps this is our moment for creativity and innovation. Maybe it is time to start a prayer shawl ministry or to have a community hymn sing. God is still calling us to be part of Christ’s healing ministry in the world, and we must respond.

Sometimes we are like the disciples. We get so wrapped up in the teachings of Jesus that we get lost in trying to understand the gospel. Studying the Bible is important and foundational, but like so many have shared you may be the only Bible some people ever read. Our faith requires action every day.

Today you are either in need of feeling God’s touch, or in need of making others aware of it. It is important to recognize that there are many people in our community who are lonely and isolated. How can we recognize those who may be disconnected? How can we recognize those in our midst who may need some extra encouragement and support?

If you are in need of feeling God’s healing touch today know that Christ is with you through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and I am always here to listen and pray for you. We must not be afraid to be vulnerable with one another when we need help.

Who are the people in your life who long to feel Christ’ healing touch? How can you be Christ’s hands and feet to them? How can we all take the time to reach out even in the midst of our busy lives?

Our psalm today from Psalm 4 reminds us that our God is still alive. Our God still hears us when we pray and when we call out. During this season of Easter we recognize that God continues to live and move in the world today. God’s healing touch can still be recognized every time we love one another, every time we make the time to care for God’s children, and every time we embody our faith.

Over these past three years you all have made God’s touch visible to me as you have prayed for and over one another, as you have cared for me and my family, and as you have grown in your faith.

Now is our opportunity to make God’s touch visible in the community. I am excited about all the possible events we may be part of this summer and we will be talking more about those ideas at our upcoming church council meetings.

Recently I heard a beautiful story about nurses who were trying to care for their patients in Brazil. During COVID restrictions so many patients have had to be alone in their hospital rooms. The nurses found that this isolation was inhibiting many patients and prolonging their healing. So, they had an idea. They tied the fingers of two latex gloves together and filled them with warm water. The patient’s hand would go in the middle of the gloves and to them it would feel like someone was holding their hand.⁵

This image was shared on social media and went viral, and it became known as the “hand of God.”⁶ Through this compassionate response many patients have felt a little less lonely and have been reminded that God is there with them holding their hand.

We are called to be God’s hands and feet to a world that is hurting and in need of care. May we continue to embody our faith as we make others aware of Christ’s touch every day. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Susan Beaumont. “How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going: Leading in a Liminal Season.” Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc. Lanham, Maryland. 2019. P.1.

² Ibid. P. 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. VIII. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 413.

⁵ <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/hand-of-god-brazil-nurses-devise-novel-idea-to-comfort-covid-19-patients-see-viral-photo/story/436173.html>

⁶ Ibid.