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“A Sense of Touch”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Second Sunday of Easter (Year C)

April 3, 2016

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

For those of you who are basketball fans, you know that we have been through a period called “March Madness.” That event will conclude tomorrow night when the University of North Carolina plays against Villanova. It is all about surviving and advancing—once you lose, it is finished, and you wait for next year. It all comes to a conclusion tomorrow night. I mention this because we are in the season of Easter, even though this is Low Sunday and you can tell by the number of people present as opposed to last Sunday—I guess that is why they call it Low. We experienced the excitement, the energy, the music, the pomp, the circumstance, the joy that captures the spirit of Easter. However, the Church reminds us over and over again that *Easter is not over*. It is not “one and done.” We are engaged in a *season*—fifty days, where we have the opportunity to relish, to savor, to penetrate the very mystery of God, who raised from the dead his son, the Lord Jesus. That is the challenge of this season, for us to penetrate the mystery, to take advantage of the opportunity in hearing the Word and being together at worship, to capture a sense of hope that the season brings because the nature of the season is all about a continuing reflection, a sense of absorption into the mystery, and integrating the mystery in our lives the very meaning of what it means to be an alleluia people.

This past Sunday, I was searching for an Easter egg for children’s sermon. I went to Kroger, Food Lion, and CVS, and all I could find were baskets that had Peeps and little booklets of dye to color eggs, but no plastic eggs! So I asked Sheila and Juliana to help me find an egg in the house. They were in the midst of doing that, and finally, Juliana says to me, “Dad, Easter is over.” But I said, “Aha! But it is not

over!”—that is the message of my sermon—“It is not over! We have fifty days to explore the mystery of this great season! I did find that egg and I will share it with the children shortly. The teachers in Sunday school had a stash of them. I should have gone there in the first place!

There is a wonderful prayer in the Jewish Book of Sabbath that assists us to recognize resurrection stories that occur within this Easter season. Maybe you have heard it before: “Days pass and years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles.” It is a real challenge for the Christian to see beyond the gloom to the glory of the resurrection. It takes a great deal of that for us to see beyond the glorious moment of our faith convictions in a world facing so much gloom, and maybe even our own personal lives. I do not need to lay out for you a laundry list of the gloomy ways in which our world engages evil and grief.

There are people who are unemployed who need work to provide for their families. Recently, I read a story about Haiti and how that country is still suffering, not just from the catastrophe of the earthquake, but from its longstanding intransigent cycle of poverty.

We know about grief, those who have lost parents, friends, spouses, and children. Sometimes it is very difficult to see the glory beyond the gloom. Desmond Tutu, in his book, *Made for Goodness*, said something simple, but profound. In every act of kindness, compassion, love, every generous expression of peace enhances the quality of life (cf. Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference*, New York: HarperCollins, 2010, p. 7). Despite the way in which our world is filled with gloom and doom, it is incumbent upon us as a Christian people of hope to recognize for ourselves and witness to others the power of the resurrection in our midst so that days pass and years vanish, and we walk with a new vision among the miracles among us.

The Scripture we just heard from the Gospel of John is a classic text that has always been read on the second Sunday of Easter. Jesus has already appeared to Mary Magdalene. She saw him, and she witnessed that to the disciples. His second appearance was to the disciples in the house where they were locked up, still full of fear.

An access point to this Scripture story is through the two senses of sight and touch. When Jesus appeared to his disciples in that house, they rejoiced when they saw him. Then the disciples passed on that seeing to Thomas, who was not there. They told him, “We had seen the Lord!” But Thomas responded, “I need more than sight and your witness. I need to touch the wounds and the nail marks.” A week later, Thomas was there when Jesus came. He said to Thomas, “See my hands. Put your finger here. Put out your hand and put it into my side. Do not doubt, but believe.” I do not know whether Thomas actually touched the nail marks or wounds in his side, but his response was a deeply felt confession that all of us have used at times in our own prayer: “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus gives us another beatitude to the list of the beatitudes on the mount. He said, “Thomas, you have come to believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe.”

The principal argument for the truth of the resurrection does not reside in pulling together all the documentary evidence of the New Testament: the empty tomb, the appearances, all of which we studied thoroughly in seminary. Even the New Testament as a whole, which witnesses profoundly to our conviction that Jesus is risen—to me, the principal argument for the truth of it all is your presence here today. Each and every Sunday, you come with your faith and with your hope to hear a word that touches you a little, to encourage you in your walk and your journey. It is not just here today that gives witness to the power of the resurrection as we gather at worship on Sunday—Resurrection Day—but also the quality of the life we lead as church throughout the course of the rest of the week. Through every act of kindness, generosity, love, and care, you enhance the quality of life. We as a community become the greatest witness to those around us of the meaning of the miracle of the resurrection. It is not by empirical verification like that which Thomas definitely sought. It was not enough that others saw and shared that with him. He wanted to see it for himself. For him, seeing was believing. In the course of his experience with Jesus, he learned that believing is, in some ways, a new way of seeing. It is not by empirical verification, but it is by the radical transformation of the community into a fellowship of community of justice, of truth, of compassion, of reconciliation, of peace and generosity. This is how the presence and power of the risen Lord is truly among us.

Listen now to the complete prayer from the Jewish Book of Sabbath, and make it your own.

Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles.

Lord God, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed.

And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it!

Amen.

Influences: Bob Dunham
Desmond Tutu