

Getting Touchy for the Kingdom

"Who touched me?" Jesus' question astounded Peter with its implication that in the red carpet grab-fest of Capernaum's main street the Lord could tell that he'd been touched (Mar 5.30). What should astound us more is that he could even tell what kind of touch it was.

Jesus halted the parade, "perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth." This wasn't some random grab or goose; this was an act of faith and a plea for help and I wonder how Jesus knew.

Not so surprising, though, according to recent research. Scientists at DePauw University assembled a random gaggle of students and had them paw one another while blindfolded in an effort to convey various emotions by simple physical contact. They could grab any "appropriate" body part they chose using any sort of grip from a clutch to a tap in an effort to express anger, fear, disgust, love and four other concepts. Recipients then picked a category from one of the eight (or the ninth option, "none of the above") to describe what they felt. The result: up to seventy-eight percent accuracy, far beyond the eleven percent the odds makers predicted for random chance.

Tiffany Field, a University of Miami touchologist not involved with this particular experiment, praised the study but added that "it's unlikely we'd use touching as a means of expression with strangers. It's reserved to intimate kinds of interactions."

"Who touched me?" A stranger who dared intimacy in the hope of healing.

Actually, Jesus' touch seemed to speak loudest to those he hardly knew. He was always glad-handing lepers and giving love-pats to corpses and hugging sawed-off tax collectors who'd just fallen out of the trees. He tapped tongues and shoved his fingers in guys' ears and on one memorable occasion swabbed spit-moistened mud onto a man's eyelids. He could heal long-distance if he wanted. Why all the touchy-feely?

"That which . . . our hands have handled" runs the old King James of 1 John 1.1. The Greek verb means to fumble around, groping like someone with soap in his eyes stepping from the shower and seeking a towel, or a sleep-deprived parent flailing for a light switch as the baby bellows in the dark. Jesus taught John that this clumsy business of skin-on-skin, even in the rugby scrum of a screaming mob, sometimes packs more power than the most eloquent words. Our klutzy touch says to Jesus, "I need you!" His manhandling response says, "I'm here."

Of course, the only hands Jesus offers these days are ours. He still has hands, of course, and the scars have healed to where he can hug us without pain. One day no doubt he will. But for now he has called us to do all the touching for him, maybe to teach us how to talk to one another.

So listen to the touches you feel today, and speak through the responses you stroke out in the eloquent Morse code of fingers and hands. Seek the Spirit-born sensitivity to know in a mob the difference between a random bump and a cry for help, and be ready to offer healing power in return.

Touché!

Doug