

Jesus, enfleshed Faith  
A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church  
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In times of grief, touch is important. I think that we can say that that is true. A dear friend, a family member, coming by in a time of loss, sitting beside you, holding your hand or giving you a hug. Or just being there, silently, showing up to be a support.

In COVID time, we felt that absence, and it seems that the lack of connection for that extended time – the inability to touch, to even visit with one another – left many feeling isolated. Imagine if the Gospels had not told the stories of Jesus visiting the friends and disciples after his death. The stories would have been emptied of their power – all the healings and teachings, but without Jesus showing up to the great surprise and disbelief of the disciples. In their disbelief, Jesus says to them, “I am no ghost. Touch me.” Perhaps sensing that they still were in the psychological bubble of grief, he asks, “Do you have some food? Here, let’s eat.”

In ancient times, there was discussion about ghosts, and how to determine if a person was a ghost or not. The ability to eat, apparently was a proof that a person was not a ghost.<sup>1</sup> Good to know, right? Hang on to that little nugget for a time when you might need it. That enfleshed quality of Jesus was hard, still is difficult, for some Christians ancient and modern. There were Christian Councils set up because some Christian leaders believed that Jesus was not really human, more supernatural. Christianity has always concluded such debates with an affirmation that Jesus, mysterious as he was, was indeed, flesh and blood, human. Even today, some elements of Christianity flirt with the idea of Jesus being above humanity. That humanity is evil, impure, messy.

Remember, though, the opening of John’s Gospel – *God’s Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood* (to paraphrase the Message translation). God became flesh. God entered into the human, messy, fleshy reality – lived, loved, and died. Unbelievable. And it was to those disciples grieving after Jesus’ death. Yes, they had heard the rumours of an empty tomb, angelic guards in the tomb saying that Jesus was alive. But in grief we have trouble believing. Those disciples did, for sure.

But Jesus met them where they were. Just as the angelic figure offered the words of peace to the visitors at the empty tomb, Jesus offers peace to the disciples. He shows up.

You may remember my reference to Franciscan priest Richard Rohr’s discussion about the process of *cleaning up*, *growing up*, psychologically, and then *waking up*, spiritually, recognizing that we are part of an interdependent world, not at the centre of it. We are not to control or manage, but to connect and care. Then there is the *showing up* part. To live in the world, with all its mystery and pain, and messy-ness. We are created in love, and created to share that love, which implies receiving love too.

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<sup>1</sup> That ghosts were not able to eat or digest food was a truism in the ancient world (one ancient text is the “Testament of Abraham: 4:9). “Theological Perspective”, Stephen A. Cooper. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

There is a lot of grief in our world today. A great deal of death and destruction – tyrants and narcissists creating chaos, depicted on 24-hour news stations. It is traumatizing. We don't even live in a place being bombed, or involved in a social media bullying incident, to feel profound grief.

I learned of a very short Mary Oliver poem entitled "Evidence". It goes like this:

*We shake with joy, we shake with grief.  
What a time they have, these two  
housed as they are in the same body.*

We cannot share in the joy of life without sharing in the grief. They are housed in the same body. Divinity does not exist for us without our embodied reality. I have heard many times a brand of Christianity that relegates our flesh to evil and sin. I don't think God thought that, or Jesus. Our Gospel Story hinges on that very reality that God loved the world so much that God poured all of Godself into humanity, enfleshed. Died, enfleshed.

God's punchline, then, after the religious and political bullies thought they had finished Jesus off, was Jesus returning to eat with his grieving friends. Only *then*, in that bodily, fleshly, connection were their eyes and hearts opened. Only after the grief, only after touching, did they experience the joy of resurrection.

So where do we need to show up, to enflesh Christ for someone this coming week? Or perhaps to enflesh God's love for a cause that has us grieving these days. Maybe it's time to enter into the messy-ness of life. Visit, talk on the phone. Contribute your time, your treasures to a cause that is near and dear to you. Jesus would not have been Jesus without his flesh. Neither would we. Let us enflesh the love of Christ, the love of God for one another. Amen.