

## EASTER 3B

We all like a good Ghost Story. Many of us must have memories of school camps where everyone tried to out-do each other in stories of ghosts and hauntings. It is still a phenomena that we see on our movie screens, with every New Year seeing a new movie come out about the supernatural. And in today's Gospel we the theme of ghosts present.

For Jesus appears to his disciples and their sublime moment of seeing their risen Lord is interrupted however, by their ongoing doubts and terror since they think they are seeing a ghost. To convince them that he is indeed really present, Jesus shows them his hands and feet. This confirmation has usually been understood as a reference to nail marks in Jesus' hands and feet. It is often connected to Psalm 22:16 and taken as a messianic prophecy anticipating the crucifixion of Jesus.

Neither the ancient Hebrew nor Greek support such a reading, however, and Psalm 22 was not

understood to be a messianic psalm in the pre-Christian period. What is happening is that Jesus is providing proof that he is not a ghost.

Among the ghost tests in antiquity, one could check extremities where bones were evident (namely, hands and feet), make sure that a person's feet were touching the ground, and show one's teeth and eat food. More significant than his hands and feet, however, is Jesus' statement: "I am myself" (Luke 24:39). So it is that, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, [Jesus] said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'" (Luke 24:41)

It took some time for Jesus disciples to come to terms with his resurrection. We still have difficulty coming to terms with it. Rising from the dead is such a strange thing to happen. It's outside our experience just as it was outside the experience of the disciples. It intrigues me that Jesus asks for food. It intrigues me that Jesus invites the disciples to touch him. Clearly he was not a ghost. There is a reality about eating and a reality about touching which we cannot ignore.

Touch. That surface sense which implies so much more. Touch which invites us in that we may see beyond the surface.

2

Touch is a strange sense that we use. For instance if I asked you to close your eyes and then I put a cup in your hand you would be able to tell me what it was. The skin on your fingers would tell you something about the shape and consistency of what you were holding. It intrigues me that it's not our fingers we feel but the object we touch. We go beyond ourselves by touch. We practice transcendence by touch. We are taken out of ourselves to experience something else.

That's why Jesus invites the disciples to touch him. It will draw them out of themselves. It will stop them thinking only about their own needs.

Jesus still invites us to touch him. That's what sacraments do. They are places where we can touch Jesus. We reach out to take the bread and wine which means, like the disciples, we are invited to touch the body of Jesus. The invitation is still there – Touch me and see. Touch me and know. Touch me and transcend yourself.

3

It is an intimate thing that Jesus asks us to do. To touch another requires trust and Jesus trusts us. We have more difficulty in inviting others to touch us. Appropriate touch is important for our health and wellbeing. Our society at present does not encourage touch. But how else are we to move from being self contained. How else to transcend ourselves but by touch?

There are many who wish to touch Jesus. They may find they can through us. Our ministry is to build

relationships which allow for the appropriate touch which conveys the Risen Life. How might we do that?

If you have ever stood at the bedside of someone who is sick, you will know that they often want to hold your hand after a handshake. They just don't let go. To touch another is healing and life giving. They are touching the risen Christ in us. Yes there are those occasions of literal touch.

4

We might also show the touch of Jesus as it is expressed in the way we create community. As we read the Acts of the Apostles during the Sundays of the Easter Season we will hear about Christian community. As the Apostles struggled to come to terms with resurrection and their renewed faith, they found community to be at its centre. Sometimes they shared everything to express community. Sometimes they took up a collection for those in need. It is clear that community issued from their shared experience of the Risen Jesus in their weekly

worship. The Breaking of Bread and the Prayers were the mainstay of community life. As the early Christians allowed people to touch the Risen Jesus in them, so they drew people into a community of believers.

For us too, the way we establish and maintain community is essential to our proclamation of the resurrection. Communities of trust, acceptance, gentleness, mercy, justice and love are places where we can touch others with the life of the Risen Jesus.

5

As Jesus invites us to touch him in the sacraments this morning, so we are to be that risen Jesus for those who still need to touch him. But even more than that Jesus also moves us forward into the future. That's why Jesus concludes with the charge to his disciples to be witnesses, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness to all nations in his name. In the Apostles' Creed, we confess that we believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that we believe in the resurrection of the body and the forgiveness of sins. Like the first disciples, we have

also experienced Jesus' real presence in the sacraments and in the church and so these statements are not just doctrines we affirm but the basis for our calling also to be witnesses of these marvellous things. Let us reach out and touch, and invite others to do the same.