

Something that lockdown has taught us is the value of touch. O how we miss hugs and handshakes from friends and family! So today (St Valentine's Day) we will celebrate the touch of God in our lives and explore our response to it in the way we touch the lives of others.

Father I place into your hands <https://youtu.be/qbLjp4-8NdY>

Lord God help us to be ready to feel the touch on our lives. You showed us the importance of love by sending Jesus to be our friend and Saviour.

When I feel the touch https://youtu.be/5_RZqgCuEFs

**Caring and compassionate God,
for all the ways you touch our lives,
reaching out to bless,
guide,
heal and strengthen,
in grateful praise
we worship you.**

**For the touch of your hand in times of need -
moments of fear and uncertainty,
doubt and disbelief,
crisis and challenge -
in grateful praise
we worship you.**

**For times you have lifted us up,
setting us on our feet again,
offering a shoulder to lean on,
an arm to steady us
and a hand to point the way,
in grateful praise
we worship you.**

**For the knowledge of your unfailing love,
always there to encircle us,
your arms outstretched to embrace
and your hand ready to take hold,
in grateful praise
we worship you.**

**Caring and compassionate God,
now we place our worship,
our lives,
our loved ones
and our world
into your hands, as
in grateful praise
we worship you. Amen**

Read: 2 Kings 5: 1-14 and Mark 1: 40-45

These two readings illustrate the difference in understanding of God in the Old and New Testaments. God distant and mystical vs God near and present.

**Forgiving God,
to our shame and sorrow we have resisted your hand,
all too often shrugging you off,
preferring our own ways to yours.**

**We have failed to recognise your touch,
forgetful of your blessing,
closed to your guidance,
unaware of your presence.**

**We had taken for granted the gift of touch -
the comfort it can bring,
reassurance offer,
love express
and solidarity articulate.
Reach out in mercy and enfold us in your gracious love.**

**Open our hearts to you now
so that we may truly be in touch with you,
one another,
ourselves
and all around us.**

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Put peace into each other's hands <https://youtu.be/ErQhErM7ZUg>

Are you in touch with God?

Of all our senses the one we probably take most for granted is that of touch. The thought of losing our sight or hearing fills most people with dread, and the idea of losing our sense of taste or smell is something we'd rather not think about. But the possibility of not feeling anything rarely occurs to us. The feel of freshly washed sheets, cat's fur, baby skin, silk, a

hug, sunshine on our face – these are so special. And yet Covid has forced us to face these fears as never before.

To the Christian touch also speaks symbolically of something deeper. Our two Bible readings lead us to consider the touch of God in our lives. Not literally in the sense of a hand reaching down from heaven but deep within – through the working of the holy spirit. It also prompts us to question our response to that touch.

I wonder if we are like Naaman and expect God's touch to be accompanied by signs and wonders, fireworks, and fanfare? Or do we come before God with a simple wish to be made clean, like the New Testament leper?

Both had sought out God's healing touch, but each had vastly different expectations.

Both were undoubtedly changed by their encounter – both were saved from a lifetime as outcasts – able to be part of their communities once more.

But for Naaman – his expectations got in the way at first, his pride was hurt. The NT leper threw any dignity aside to BEG for healing.

What type of God-seeker am I?

After being touched by God both reacted differently. Beyond the end of our set reading in 2 Kings (you can read yourself to the end of chapter 5) Naaman says he will worship only the true God but asks to be excused that he will live his life as if nothing has changed. He wants to continue to be the Rulers right hand man and not rock the boat.

On the other hand, the NT leper is told sternly to say nothing – but he didn't. He went out proclaiming freely.

What type of God-seeker am I?

Do I, like Naaman, expect to be able to continue as before – worshipping privately but outwardly no different? Or like the NT leper – do I spread the word about what God has done for me?

You've heard the saying "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Let us share the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Yours are the only hands with which he can do his work.

Yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world.

Yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours. Amen

We are the hands of God <https://youtu.be/FOQQUIrWHcE> (an American video but the message applies in UK)

For God 
SO LO^VED THE WORLD
THA^TT HE GAVE HIS
ON^LY
BEGOTTEN
SON SO 
THA^TT WHOEVER
BEL^IEVES
IN HIM SHALL
HAV^E EVERLASTING
Life 

Will you come and follow me? <https://youtu.be/liUlxlaCRO>