

One of the more successful email viruses of the last 15 years was contained in a message which said 'I love you'. If you opened it it sent itself to everyone in your address book. It worked because, even in an impersonal email people were pleased to think someone loved them. I was more upset that, in the office where I then worked, no one sent it to us.

Our reading from Mark's Gospel is, I think, all about the personal assurance of a real love which goes beyond anything we can imagine, a love which when touched opens us up to the healing of lifelong wounds, and raises us from death to life.

The Gospels offer us different ways of looking at Jesus. Mark chose to focus on when Jesus did things – where he healed, and acted, and delivered demons, and turned over tables. This is the Jesus who touches, and is touched, who spits, who puts children on his knee, who sits and eats with people. There are not many parables in Mark. Here is the God you can touch. Love, if it is love, needs to be real, and to be real it should be touchable. It needs to get its hands dirty, to be in the hustle and bustle of a crowd, to give tangible signs of itself. Just reflect on how much sensing there is here.

Jairus falls at his feet, the crowd presses in, the woman touches his cloak, he looks carefully at the people around him, he hears the noise of the professional mourners wailing, he has been asked to lay hands on Jairus's daughter, but in fact gently takes her by the hand, and finally asks for food for the girl he has raised.

I take a simple lesson and a deep truth from this. We need to make our feelings, our determinations, our love, tangible. If you are to assure someone they are loved, then demonstrate it.

That's the simple lesson. The deep truth springs from it. The incarnation is all about God taking flesh. As we rejoice in the glorified risen Lord Jesus God now has, in the words of the prayer, no hands but ours. In taking human flesh, our nature, God restores our fallenness and brokenness, and opens us these hands, these ears and eyes, to be agents of his transforming love in the world. God asks us to make his love real in our own actions.

The Jesus Mark tells us about gets involved with people at the point of their deepest need. Here it is a woman who has exhausted medical science with her bleeding, who is not only ill but religiously unclean (and therefore permanently outcast), and in a place of total despair. There is so much the healing teaches – that whatever our situation and the level of desperation, we can reach out to a God who can be touched; that the smallest amount of faith opens up the complete love of God; that we are not a broken figure in a crowd, but an individual to whom God gives worth and wholeness – and so on and so on.

Here's one though. In Jewish law if you touched someone or something that was religiously unclean, you became unclean yourself. When Jesus was touched by the woman – and made it obvious that he had been – he joined her in her uncleanness. The healing takes place at her level of need, not in any exalted sense of Jesus on high. We are touched by a God who joins us, and holding on to that loving embrace he lifts us up to wholeness and the place of glory. No one is beyond that. He reaches out to our point of need.

The healing takes place on the way to the lowest, most desperate place you can imagine. The death bed of a child. This grief has caused the ruler of the synagogue to beg before a man he does not know. Here there is no hope. And Jesus places hope where there is only despair. He brings a future where there has only been a past.

The touch of love here conquers death, as a foretaste of Christ's own victory which is our Easter song. And again, see the intimacy of the touch of love, as Jesus holds her hand and speaks gentle words. God's love knows the depths of human agony. The reality of the love of God is that it embraces even our death, and as we respond to the touch, so our death is turned to life. Even as our bodies tell us that we need healing, and that death will one day beckon, so we are filled with life eternal, so we may embrace our own frailty and look for the life to come. That is a light which breaks through the blackest of nights.

Here God's love touches us, heals, makes clean, brings back to life. When we worship, pray and listen, when we receive Communion, and rejoice in baptism, we touch and taste and hear and see the intimate, tactile, tangible love of God.

May we open ourselves to that touch, and in doing so offer it to others, that the reality of the love of God, its healing power and the promise of life may speed quicker than an email virus into a needy world. Amen.