

## *OUT OF TOUCH*

Eastertide, Earth Sunday, April 19, 2015

Luke 24.35-48

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Anthem: “Colors of the Wind,” by Stephen Schwartz and Alan Menken for the Disney film *Pocahontas*.

Sermon & Text: “Out of Touch,” Luke 24.35-48

You may recognize this music. It won an Oscar at the 68<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards in 1995 as Best Original Song for the movie, *Pocahontas* – one of Disney’s recent attempts at providing images of strong female characters and a connection to the natural world.

Of course, *Pocahontas* is Disney’s characterization of a Native American spirituality but it does make me wonder if this whole idea of resurrection we are thinking about during this Easter season isn’t easier – or more comprehensible – for Native peoples than for some of us.

This is what the choir just sang:

*You think you own whatever land you land on  
The earth is just a dead thing you can claim  
But I know every rock and tree and creature  
Has a life, has a spirit, has a name.*

In other words, the whole world, whether it seems dead to us or not, is so infused with life that nothing is really dead at all. Modern physics might tell us the same thing about energy being transformed but never lost.

Disney or not, the lyrics of this song are really not that far from the speech attributed to Chief Seattle:

*Even the rocks, he says,  
that seem to lie dumb ...  
thrill with memories of past events ...  
and the very dust under your feet  
responds more lovingly to our footsteps than to yours,  
because it is the ashes of our ancestors,  
and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch,  
for the soil is rich with the life of our kindred.*

Maybe this whole idea of life out of death – life beyond death -- feels a little foreign to us because we are out of touch with that visceral connection to the Life that flows all around us and in us and through us.

Maybe Earth Day in the middle of Eastertide makes a particular kind of sense as a call to do more than simply imagine life after death. But to experience it. To get in touch with it. To walk – literally and *spiritually* – lovingly on this earth, as Chief Seattle says, because it is the ashes of all the life that has gone before, “our bare feet conscious of the sympathetic *touch* [because] the soil is rich with the life of our kindred.”

Our friends at New Hope Baptist Church started a program called “Clean Greens” several years ago. They did so for two reasons: (1) because they realized how hard it was for folks living in the Central District to find good quality vegetables that would improve their diets and (2) because they discovered that their young people had lost touch with where food comes from. Part of their program was to take youth out to their farm in Maple Valley and give them the opportunity to plant and weed and get their hands into the dirt. Our friends at New Hope know that our spiritual lives suffer – and our spiritual development gets arrested – if we lose our connection to the Earth.

One of my favorite authors is Scott Russell Sanders, mostly because he writes about home and that is especially important to me right now. Having this living connection with the earth is, he says, “sexy.” That’s right. I said it – or actually Scott Russell Sanders said it – that s-e-x word and I’m saying it right now, out-loud, at church.

*Earth is sexy, [he writes] just as sex is earthy. Each of us is a landscape of plains and peaks, valleys and thickets. I speak in metaphors, as through a garbled phone line, but what I mean is plain and simple: body and land are one flesh. They are made out of the same stuff. [Our biblical tradition tells us that: God formed human being out of the dust of the earth and then breathed God’s own life into us, so land and body are made out of the same stuff.] Their beauty is one beauty, their wounds the same wounds. They call to us in the same perennial voice, crying, Come see, come touch, come listen and smell, and O come taste. We explore them – land and body – alike. The health or sickness of one is inseparable from that of the other. There is no division between where we live and what we are.*

Land and body are one. One is not dead and the other living. Buried in the ground or rising out of it, it is one flesh infused with one life, one beauty, one set of wounds, one call to see and listen, taste and smell and *touch*.

And if these resurrection stories we have been telling this season don't make much sense to us, maybe it is because we are out of touch with just how grand and glorious and connected and complicated life on this Earth really is.

After living in that wide awake experience of life Jesus had called them to when he was alive, now that he's dead, the disciples seem to have lost touch with that sense of life.

Lesson: Luke 24.35-48

Then the travelers recounted what happened on the road, and how they had come to know Jesus – the Risen Jesus -- in the breaking of the bread.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus actually stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

In their panic and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus said to them, "Why are you disturbed? Why do such ideas cross your mind? Look at my hands and my feet; it's me, really. Touch me and see – a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as I do." After saying this, Jesus showed them the wounds.

They were still incredulous for sheer joy and wonder, so Jesus said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" After being given a piece of cooked fish, the savior ate in their presence.

Then Jesus said to them, "Remember the words I spoke when I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the psalms had to be fulfilled."

Then Jesus opened their minds to the understanding of scriptures, saying, "That is why the scriptures say that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. In the Messiah's name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all this.

Witnesses of what? Ghosts and phantoms? No. Witnesses of something you can touch; something you can get your hands on that points to a reality of life that is way out of our hands. It is the witness of First John:

*We declare to you that which was from the beginning,  
what we have heard,*

*what we have seen with our eyes,  
what we have looked at and touched with our hands,  
concerning the word of life –  
this eternal life that has been revealed to us.*

Resurrection isn't what we imagine about life after death. It's a testimony about an experience we have in our own bodies and in our connection with one another and in our connection with the Earth that keeps reminding us that eternal life is happening every day.

What if resurrection is something that happens when we do something as simple as eat together? According to Luke, the Risen Jesus – this Transformed Jesus -- is known to the disciples in the breaking of the bread. When they think they must be seeing a ghost, he says, “do you have anything to eat,” and “he ate in their presence,” the story says.

How did eating together become evidence of the resurrection? How is it an experience of eternal life?

I got me thinking about Wednesday Dinners.

Without the Earth there would be no food. Without each other – and serving one another – there would be no opportunity for relationship. Without some kind of blessing that recognizes the gift of the food and of one another, there would be no acknowledgement of that Spirit of Life in which we live and move and have our being. Eating together is, in other words, an experience of the Earth around us, the connection between us, and the power beyond us. It is resurrection because it has the power to transform those few mundane moments into an experience – a taste maybe – of eternal life.

But maybe you arrive on Wednesday night with a bad attitude. The traffic is terrible. The menu isn't what you had in mind. The conversation is less than stellar. And you are just plain crabby. And then someone says something or does something or you just wake up to the great gift of this moment with people who, like you are doing the best they can to be human, people who are doing together what could just as easily be done alone, and you get it. You get in touch with this connection that stretches back across time and forward into eternity. And you forgive yourself. And you forgive all those folks that made the day miserable because you get it now that holding on to all that frustration and blame just poisons the food and the fellowship.

Jesus says in this resurrection story that, in his name, forgiveness will be preached to all nations and, honestly, sometimes Wednesday Dinners are an exercise in everyday forgiveness.

And if there is one thing I have learned, when it comes to forgiveness, I need as much exercise as possible. I need to find ways to move beyond guilt and blame to honestly acknowledge my responsibility to make opportunities to tend that eternal life that is my connection with the Earth and with each of you.

Without forgiveness, it's hard to imagine any kind of future for the Earth and for all of us who share it. It won't be the kind of forgiveness that just lets people off the hook. But it will need to be some form that rises above guilt and blame to some new vision for our life together – something we might call 'eternal life.'

There are heroic stories of forgiveness – the Amish community that forgave the man who lined up their children and shot them down in their country school or the reconciliation between Japanese and American pilots who flew so close to each other they could see the faces – and the fear – of those they shot down in the war.

These stories may be helpful to inspire us to take on the larger challenges of forgiveness. But sometimes I'm afraid that being enamored of them, we lose touch with those ordinary everyday exercises of forgiveness that make the connection with eternal life possible.

And then there is touch. If you are around for a Wednesday Dinner, be prepared to be touched. There's hugging and hand-shaking and the touch of a shoulder.

This Risen Transformed Jesus says, "touch me and see." In Scott Russell Sanders vision, the Earth cries out: Our beauty is one beauty, our wounds the same wound; Come see, come touch!

I remember reading stories of Romanian orphans who experienced huge psychological trauma because there weren't enough workers to go around and these babies would go for days without ever being touched.

I remember soon after I was ordained, my dad and I had gone out to lunch. As we were driving home, we saw a car stopped on the side of the road with the doors open and a man standing outside. We pulled over to discover that this man's wife was propped up in the back seat having some kind of physical distress.

This was in the days before cell phones so dad got in his car and drove off to get help. The man just stood there saying, “I don’t know what to do; I don’t know what to do.”

I didn’t know what to do either – except one thing. I crawled into the back seat and I put my arm around the woman – this woman I had never met – and just said “we’re here; we’re here with you.”

I could feel her begin to relax as we sat there and breathed together. “We’re here,” I kept saying until the paramedics arrived.

The truth is I didn’t know what to do. The only think I knew was the power of touching someone.

It’s that same power our friends at New Beginnings know when they invite their young people to get their hands dirty – to get their fingers down into the Earth.

It’s the same power Chief Seattle knew when he talks about “our bare feet conscious of the sympathetic *touch* [because] the soil is rich with the life of our kindred.”

Touch is powerful. It is so powerful, in fact, we have to be careful with it. There are some boundaries we should not cross. There are some presumptions we need to be careful about making.

I remember reading a story by Robert Fulghum about the “great hugging plague” that broke out among Unitarians. Touching was a scandal and some folks had shirts made that read, “Don’t hug on me.”

They were right, of course, that our personal space should be respected.

But there is also something to be said about the power of touching one another and touching the Earth. So this hymn (we are singing verses 1 and 4) says: “Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently” and “Teach us, deflect us, Christ [this Risen Transforming One] Christ reconnect us.”

It’s so easy to be out of touch. So maybe it’s time for some reconnecting this morning. “Touch and see,” Jesus says. And, today, if you hear that voice, do not harden your hearts.

## NOTES

The information about today's anthem is available online at [Wikipedia.com](http://Wikipedia.com). There are several versions and adaptations of Chief Seattle's speech. This one is Dr. Henry Smith's early version printed October 29, 1887 in the *Seattle Morning Star*. It is included along with two other version in *How Can One Sell the Air?*, eds. Eli Gifford and R Michael Cook (The Book Publishing Company, Summertown, TN, 1992), see p.21. Scott Russell Sanders, *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* ( Beacon Press, 1993), pp. 94-95.