



Sermon Growth Guide

January 16, 2022

Missing Pieces - The Human touch



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Acts 3:1-10

Key Verse: Acts 3:16 “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.”

Big Idea: Our bodies are designed to be instruments of blessing.

Foundations

Welcome to week two of *Missing Pieces*. In Christ, what is missing is found. What is lacking is filled up. The Missing Pieces of our lives become sites of Resurrection.

This week, we dive into our physicality. God creates not just our souls, but creates us too with physical bodies that are designed to bless. Our sermon reaches a climax when Pastor Tim asks us, “So, how is your relationship with your body? ... the real missing piece is how confused we are about our bodies.”

Gnosticism isn’t just an ancient philosophy; it’s alive and well today in our cultural attitude toward the body, toward the physical. Gnostics separate the body and spirit and declare that the spirit is good, but the body (as part of the physical) is problematic, evil.

Scripture says that the body is a gift from God to be understood as a part of what makes you be you. Your whole self, including your physical self, is precious and is designed to bring God glory, you good, and the world blessing. Eternal life includes the physical. Jesus’ physical body was not just resurrected, but Jesus physically ascended to the Father and eternal life will include the physical.

In Christ your physicality is healed and redeemed and blessed. And that which is blessed is blessed to be a blessing.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Acts 3:1-10. This week we’re paying special attention to our physicality. Note all the references to the physical in our passage today.

By what power does healing take place?

Verse eight describes the man’s response to being healed. Discuss this response of “walking and jumping, and praising God.”

Applying God’s Word

Our bodies are designed to be instruments of blessing.

Host a discussion on how each person in your circle views your physicality. What brokenness comes with your physicality? How has COVID wreaked havoc on the physical nature of being human?

How can you use your body to be a blessing to those around you?

Witnessing God’s Word

How are we, the church, called to witness God’s grace in Christ with our bodies, our physicality, during COVID? How can we walk in the grace and truth of Jesus through these difficult times?

Are you ready for awkward? How about when your pastor says, we are going to have a whole sermon about touching each other? **The Human Touch.** We are still in what is probably the most impactful and formative event of our lifetime, a global pandemic. Just when you think the snake is dead, it rears up and bites us. Thankfully, we are past the early stage of unknowing. I remember the first time my mom came over to visit and we were so careful, outside, with masks on, measuring six feet out on the lawn. It was something going through a global pandemic that did not allow us to touch one another. Before the pandemic began, a dear woman hugged me in the hall before church, almost lost in my robe. It was such a warm hug, I thanked her for it and looked forward to it each week. She said it is one of the only hugs she gives and receives in her regular week, as she lives alone with no family nearby. I thought of her all year in isolation.

We were made to touch, and there is power in human touch. Jesus rarely healed without touch. Peter reached out and took the lame man's right hand. The church needs the human touch. Now, human contact can be misused. It can be violent, painful, risky, even sometimes traumatizing. It is something to use responsibly. But I shudder when I hear people say things like, "I think shaking hands is out forever. I don't think I'll ever hug at church," or "Maybe we will just always wear masks now." We were made for human touch and face to face communication. It might be risky, but it is powerful and it's a missing piece when we don't have it. I'll tell you, the original plan for today was that I wanted to end the service telling all of you to take hands across the aisle for the benediction. Hold hands everybody! I won't do that. We are still fighting this fight. There is a danger to be managed and a community to think of and protect. Isn't that something though? Calling the church to hold hands would be a radical, risky endeavor.

My first church in New Jersey where I served as an associate pastor was a hold-hands church. Every benediction had the whole congregation holding

hands across the center aisle. I loved that. When I got to Atlanta, I wanted to try that on with my new church. We had a sunrise service for Easter out in the garden. At the end of it I said, "So, everybody take the hand of the person next to you." These two dads were in the back, two engineers, who had come and set up chairs for the service, but there was no one else around them! One of them is still a very close friend. I can remember the look on his face standing there in the garden holding hands with one other guy waiting for me to finish this long charge and benediction. We discontinued that practice. I wanted us to do it today, but we still can't.

Time and time again in the Bible we see healing accompanied by the human touch. "Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong" (Acts 3:6-7). Why did Peter reach out and take his hand at the moment of healing? Why did Jesus touch almost everyone he healed during his ministry? Why does the Bible say when someone is sick to gather the elders and lay hands on them? "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord." (James 5:14) Touch. Human touch. Why do we hold babies and touch children and adults with water at baptism? Why do we ordain with the laying on of hands? Timothy received such an ordination, as we read about: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). There is something about human touch that is critical, powerful, meaningful. What an extraordinary time we are in where the pastor has to make arguments for the simplest things—coming to church and holding hands!

In the Old Testament, most references to laying hands on someone refer to violence. That's why we say, "don't lay a hand on her." Or it was how the priest transferred the sins of the people onto

the sacrificial lamb, or the scapegoat who would bear the sins of the people. Touch can be harmful. Jesus laid his hands on people to bless. Not to put sin on them, to put the blessing of God on them. Often it was part of a miraculous healing. Sometimes it was just a blessing. “And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). It’s risky to touch kids, you know. They can be little germ factories. For Jesus, the human touch was a blessing. Something about the church includes touch. Contact. Using our bodies to bless one another. I’m telling you it is a missing piece. And what do we do with missing pieces? We try to fill those gaps with all kinds of unhealthy things. God made us for the human touch.

Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray in the afternoon. “Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts” (Acts 3:2). This man, we learn, was hindered in his abilities from the time of his birth. Never in his life did his body work like everyone else’s. He was carried to his place of begging, at the gate called Beautiful. “When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’” (Acts 3:3-4). Peter calls for face to face contact with the man. There is connection in face to face contact. The man looked. He gave them his attention. Then the healing: “Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk’” (Acts 3:6). There are gifts more powerful than money. The name of Jesus Christ carries power.

Peter has gone out on a limb here. First, he stopped to address the man. Then he forced the man’s attention, raising his expectations and those of the crowd, that something was about to happen. Then he spoke fully relying on God. It is not Peter’s power or ability that will make a change. God has to move. Peter went out on a limb, took the risk, and spoke on the grounds of

the power of the name of Jesus to make things right. Note this now, Peter didn’t say “be healed” and he didn’t just say “stand up.” What did he order the man to do? “Walk.” We’ll go back to that. Then there was one more risk. As an act of faith, Peter reached out, as he had seen Jesus do so many times before, and took the man’s hand. “Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong” (Acts 3:7). Peter risked the touch, the human touch. He already had the attention. The ideas and words were clear. The spiritual outcomes were already secured. But the human touch was the vehicle for the healing moment to come.

Now we get to see this man whole. Get up and walk! In the name of Jesus walk! “He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8). You get the impression he is having his own little party there, isn’t he? Walking and jumping and praising God! He is at home in his body. The thing he could not do, walk, move himself, take himself from place to place, the thing he could not do in his body he finally could do! Walk. Feel your body under you as an agent of your will, as a servant and instrument. Do that thing you could never do! Walk and move about and go where you wish. He does it. And it feels so good to do it he can’t stop jumping and dancing and praising God for the gift! Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is a man alive.” Here is a man alive, to the glory of God. It happened at the gate called Beautiful.

So, how is your relationship with your body? I told you, this was going to get awkward! Human touch is the way we interact with one another using our bodies. How is your relationship with your body? The man had a terrible relationship with his body. His body was limited from birth. Then Peter, Jesus through Peter, touched him and healed him and things were different. How is your relationship with your body? When I talk about the Missing Pieces here, I am not just talking about missing holding hands or hugging, but the real missing piece is how confused we are about

our bodies. Some say, “I’m trapped in my body.” They say their physical body does not reflect who they are inside. For some, this is something from birth or maybe an accident or illness, but others separate their true identity from their physical body, and say, this physical body is not me. It needs to be surgically altered or medically rearranged. This is a confusion.

In the ancient world, there was a pattern of thought called Gnosticism that separated the body and the spirit. The real you was your spirit and the body was an unfortunate trap you were stuck in. That’s not God’s view. God made body and soul, flesh and spirit, united as one. A human being is not a spiritual being stuck in a physical shell. No, your body is part of you. God made us body and soul. “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Our twisted relationship with the human body causes so much pain and turmoil. This is a really complicated area, and I know I’m only gesturing at a topic that could occupy us for hours of lectures, but the missing piece is the Human Touch. Being at home in our body and ready to use that body to bless others, safely, humbly, in service and love. There are ways we are in conflict. Our body, our flesh, forms habits that can pull us from God. We have conflict with our bodies, but God made us to be an integrated whole, loving and serving Him, body and soul.

Your body can be a blessing, when it is put into the service of Christ. It can be a blessing to you, to those around you, to the Lord. When it is submitted to humble service. You see, God likes bodies. God made bodies. Jesus took on a body. The formal term for the birth of Christ at Christmas is the incarnation. Jesus, God, took on flesh, took on a body. Did he hold his nose while he did it? “Ew! This is gross!” No. God loved what he made and took on flesh, took on a body, in order to save and redeem what he had made. People argued about what Jesus did. Did Jesus, God, the Holy God, really take on a body? Didn’t he just put it on like a cloak?

Wasn’t it more like a gold coin hidden under a coat of mud? Wasn’t God really inside that body, but untouched by it, unmolested, unperturbed by the little aches and pains, sickness and hungers and needs of the body? The church rallied eventually around saying, yes, Jesus did take on a body. In fact, if Jesus did not take on the body, we would not be saved. The church rallied around the saying, “What is not assumed is not redeemed.” If Jesus didn’t fully become a man, just like you and I are men and women; if Jesus didn’t fully become human just like you and I are human, then he didn’t really get low enough to lift humanity up and save a woman and a man like you and me.

Jesus didn’t hold his nose when he took up a body. He became a man, took a body, and used it to accomplish God’s purposes. To carry our sin to the cross. But after that. After he died. After he rose again. After he was seen alive again in the flesh after he had been publicly killed and buried, he didn’t leave that body behind, did he? He took it up and carried it into heaven. Jesus ascended into heaven, bodily, in the flesh, into the heavenly places, into the Kingdom of God where he already resides, in the flesh, in the body. Yes, there is a purpose and a value to the human body and the Human Touch. Be safe. Be aware. Be humble and serving of others, but as we walk on through this next stage of the global pandemic, remember, one day we must return to the Human Touch.