

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 10 October 2021**

Children's Talk: The Blessing of Touch

- We've been talking about the 5 senses.
 - Two weeks ago I talked about smelling and tasting.
 - Last week Mr. Glenn talked about seeing and hearing.
 - What does that leave? (Touch.)

- Let's imagine what life would be like if, in your family, you couldn't touch each other.
 - You could hear each other and see each other but couldn't touch.
 - Like if the Lord had created us in big bubbles so that we couldn't touch each other.
 - Like there was always a barrier between us and other people.
 - [Two volunteers from same family to try it.]
- What would that be like?
 - COVID has given us a feel for what it would be like.
 - Or it might be like if you could only talk to and see your mom, dad, and brothers and sisters on screens rather than touching them.

- There was a story where some people wanted the Lord to touch their children and the disciples didn't want them to.
 - Mark 10:13-16 (NKJV)
 - ¹³ Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." ¹⁶ And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

- The people wanted him to touch their children and the Lord wanted to touch them.
 - And it was a blessing for everyone involved.
 - And touch can be a blessing—it's so nice to be able to have a good hug, or a high five, or have a good friendly wrestle.

- But because there's no boundary between people and because we can touch other people, we can also hurt them and can get hurt.
 - We can hit, bite, pinch, poke, punch, kick.
 - We can hurt other people.
 - And other people can hurt us.
 - If you get upset and hit someone or hurt them, it happens.
 - You can apologise and keep working on learning to control yourself.

- Each person gets to decide whether they want to be touched or not.
 - We need to respect what other people do and don't want.
 - And we also get to decide whether we want to be touched or not and in what way.
- We can try to remember that it is a gift that the Lord made it so that we can touch each other and we can try to use touch as a way to love and connect with people and we can try to not hurt other people.
- *Amen.*

The Five Senses, Part 3: Touch

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
10 October 2021

Intro

- Maybe I shouldn't say it but I can't resist: the sense of touch is a touchy subject.
- If I start talking about good kinds of touch and bad kinds of touch, I would guess that you would feel somewhat uncomfortable or sensitive.

- But even if I don't get into the most touchy parts of this subject, touch is still a sensitive thing to talk about.
 - Touch is a powerful sense.
 - We can experience pain and pleasure through our other senses but it seems like we experience them most powerfully through our sense of touch.
- A big part of the power of touch comes from its role in our relationships.
 - Touch is one of the most powerful ways that we communicate and experience affection, comfort, and love.
 - Touch is also one of the most powerful ways that we communicate and experience anger, pain, and coercion.

- Depending on your varied experiences, this could be a triggering topic for you or for the people around you.
 - You are under no obligation to keep listening to this sermon if it's not going to be useful to you right now.
 - And if you would like to talk to someone about anything that this topic might bring up for you, I am available and there are other safe people too.
 - We also have posted a list of local resources on our website that are available to you.
 - We are able to guide/assist you in accessing these resources if needed.
 - [They are also listed at the bottom of this document.]

- We'll start with a few more general teachings about the sense of touch;
 - and then we'll move into some of the specific uses of our sense of touch and the implications of those things in our lives;
 - and then we'll wrap up by talking about the Lord and touch.

The Sense of Touch

- To recap things that we've covered in the previous sermons in this series, our five physical senses have a correspondence with things going on within our spirits (*Secrets of Heaven* §4404).
 - This connection has applications both directions:
 - We can gain some insight into what's going on in our spirits by seeing how those spiritual dynamics manifest themselves in our physical senses.
 - And we can understand better what's going on with our physical senses when we understand the spiritual causes behind them.

- An interesting thing that distinguishes our sense of touch from our other senses is how widespread it is in our bodies (*Secrets of Heaven* §6057).
 - We see just with our eyes; we hear just with our ears; etc.
 - But we feel with our whole bodies.
- This seems to relate to an interesting point that the teachings of the New Church make about the sense of touch: in some ways it encompasses all of the other senses.
 - *Secrets of Heaven* §3528
 - [A]ll sensation and all perception, which appear so various, are referable to one common and universal sense, namely, the sense of touch....
 - Sight is how our body senses light touching the eye; hearing is how our body senses sound waves touching our ear drums; smelling and tasting are how our body senses different chemicals touching our taste buds on our tongue or smell receptors in our noses.
- This all-encompassing nature of our sense of touch is perhaps why it has the spiritual correspondence that it does.
- The teachings of the New Church say that, with the different physical senses, some of them relate more to our intellect or the thinking part of us (like the sense of sight), and some of them relate more to the will or love part of us.
 - The sense of touch relates more to the will or love part of us (*Secrets of Heaven* §5077:3).
 - One passage says “the sense of touch corresponds to the affection of good” (*Secrets of Heaven* §4404).
 - The sense of touch is related to our ability to sense, receive, and experience goodness, love, and kindness.
 - And if you think about it more broadly, all of our senses were given to us by the Lord so that we could receive His love so maybe that’s why our sense of touch encompasses all of our other senses.
- Now, of course, any sense that is designed to sense something good can also sense its opposite.
 - Our sense of touch can also relate to our ability to sense, receive, and experience things like evil, hatred, and cruelty.
 - We’ll get into that more as we go through the more specific uses of our sense of touch.
- Let’s get into that now.
 - The three main uses of our sense of touch that we’re going to talk about are
 - Recognising What Things Are
 - Avoiding Getting Hurt
 - Connecting With Others

Recognising What Things Are

- The teachings of the New Church say that the sense of touch comes from “the love of recognising objects arising from the love of awareness of one’s surroundings and of self-preservation” (*Married Love* §210).
- How do we recognise objects with our sense of touch?
 - Touch gives us different information about an object than we get from our other senses.
 - From sight we can get a pretty good sense of the object’s texture but it’s a lot harder to see how heavy something is or how hot or cold it is.
 - But if we were to touch that thing or try to pick it up, we would immediately know how heavy it is and how hot or cold it is (*Secrets of Heaven* §6057).
 - This seems like it might relate to how it’s not really an intellectual exercise to really feel the emotional weight of a situation.
 - And it’s not an intellectual exercise to sense the coldness or warmth in an interaction.
 - Those are both things that we sense with our will, with our heart, with our spiritual sense of touch.
 - And, interestingly, these emotional states are the kinds of things that people are talking about when they say that someone is or is not “in touch” with what’s going on in a situation.
- So we gain very useful and important information from our sense of touch that we don’t get from our other senses.
- But it’s also important to recognise the limitations of our sense of touch.
- There’s a really interesting story that illustrates this in the book of Genesis.
 - The set up is that there’s an old father named Isaac and he wants to bless his son Esau and so he sends Esau out to go hunt for some game.
 - The plan is that Esau will then prepare a meal for his father.
 - His father will eat it and then bless him afterwards.
 - But Esau’s twin brother Jacob hears about the plan and decides to trick his father and steal his brother’s blessing.
 - As soon as Esau leaves to go hunting, then Jacob (with the help of his mother) prepares some food for Isaac, using meat from their flock.
 - And then he disguises himself by putting hairy goat skins on himself to simulate Esau’s hairiness.
 - And he puts on Esau’s clothes so that he smells like him.
- Genesis 27:21-23, 26-27 (NKJV)
 - ²¹ Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.” ²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.
- And then a little further on it says this:
 - ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near now and kiss me, my son.” ²⁷ And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him....

- Let's see how his senses did:
 - His sense of touch was fooled by the goat skins.
 - His sense of hearing was *not* fooled by Jacob's voice.
 - His sense of smell was fooled by Jacob wearing Esau's clothes.
- And none of this fooling would have been possible if Isaac's eyesight had been OK.
 - The story opens with it saying, "Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see...." (Genesis 27:1).
- There is a complex inner meaning to all of this that we're not going to get into right now but, in a simpler way, it seems to reflect the reality that without a sight of truth, our desire to receive goodness will be easily misled.
 - There is a certain blindness to touch on its own.
 - Our sense of touch may tell us that something is genuinely good when, in fact, it just *feels* good.
 - We need a sense of truth or spiritual sight to be able to really see things for what they are and to discriminate between two things that might seem similar.

Avoiding Getting Hurt

- Another big use of our sense of touch is to help us avoid hurting ourselves.
- Nobody likes to feel pain but it's so important to be able to feel pain.
 - When people can't feel pain, they end up accidentally hurting themselves a lot more.
 - Like if you get your jaw numbed to have some dental work done and then you end up accidentally biting your lip because you can't feel it.
- Emotional pain is the same; it hurts but it's very important that we are able to feel it.
 - If a person *can't* feel emotional pain at all, they're going to have a harder time than a person who *can* feel their emotional pain.
 - Emotional pain is a very important signal to pay attention to as we navigate our lives in this world—it helps us learn what things hurt us and so what things might hurt other people; it helps us understand what parts of ourselves are especially sensitive or injured.
- Avoiding things that might hurt us seems to be what a lot of Old Testament references to touch have to do with.
 - There are two major categories of things that the Children of Israel were commanded not to touch:
 - Holy things—like Mt Sinai and the Ark of the Covenant.
 - Unclean things—like dead bodies and graves.
- The danger of both of these categories can be understood better when we understand that touch also involves something being shared or communicated.
 - *Apocalypse Explained* §659
 - "To touch" signifies, in the Word, to communicate. Therefore to avoid falsities and evils being communicated, and so appropriated, it was forbidden to touch unclean things....
- To picture how something is communicated by touch, it might be useful to picture a toddler walking around with finger paint all over their hands—whenever they touch something they will be sharing or communicating something from them (the paint) onto someone new.

- So something is shared from the person doing the touching to the person or thing that they touch.
- It also goes the other way.
 - We can again use paint to picture how this works.
 - Imagine a wall that has just been painted.
 - Anything that touches that wall while the paint is wet will have something shared with it from the wall, because of the contact.

- A lot of the unclean things that the Children of Israel were not supposed to touch were things like dead bodies or unrefrigerated pork that would have a lot of harmful germs on them.
 - There were practical reasons not to touch those things, in addition to the religious reasons.
 - Often our other senses, like our sense of smell, would warn us not to touch these things but it's when we actually touch them that we are in danger.
 - The teachings of the New Church say that evils are like different infectious, contagious diseases (*Secrets of Heaven* §10130:10).
 - We might be inclined to move through life, trying a bit of everything, kind of like a toddler licking every railing they come across.
 - But that is a dangerous way to live.
 - We need to trust that the Lord knows what He's talking about when He tells us to avoid touching certain things.

- What's going on with the holy things that the Children of Israel were not allowed to touch?
 - In this case the problem was in what the people would do to the holy things by touching them.
 - Imagine that you have a precious family Bible in some important place in your home and someone came in from the garden with muddy hands and wanted to pick it up.
 - Certain things need to be not treated casually or carelessly; certain things are sacred.
 - What the Lord teaches in His Word is sacred; I can't just reach out and mess with it however I want.

Connecting

- There's more that we could talk about there but now let's move on to the use of touch in connecting.
- The teachings of the New Church say that touch has a unique role in marriage.
 - *Married Love* §210
 - Every love has its own special sense.

The love of joining oneself with one's partner, arising from a love of uniting goodness and truth,... has touch as its special sense....

The fact that the sense of touch is dedicated to married love and is special to it is evident from all the play it inspires and from the way its subtleties are raised to the most exquisite pitch.

- *Heaven and Hell* §402
 - The marriage delight, which is a purer and more exquisite delight of touch, transcends all the rest because of its use, which is the procreation of the human race and thereby of angels of heaven.
- In case you missed it, these passages are talking about sex or lovemaking.
 - The teaching is that the reason sex in marriage is so enjoyable is because of its connection to the very important use of making more human beings.
- The sense of touch in marriage is about more than just pleasure: it's also a very important form of communication between the couple.
- There's a story in the teachings of the New Church in which Swedenborg talks to some married couples in heaven and the angel wives explain what is communicated to them through their sense of touch:
 - *Married Love* §155b:4
 - "Every man has five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. But we have also a sixth sense, which is a sense of all the delights of married love in our husbands. We have this sense in the palms of our hands, whenever we touch our husbands' chests, arms, hands or cheeks—especially their chests—and also when we are touched by them. All the happy and pleasant states of the thoughts of their mind, and all the joys and delights of their heart, and the amusement and cheerfulness in their chests—these are then transmitted from them to us, taking form in us and becoming perceptible, discernible, and tangible. Moreover, we discern these things as keenly and as clearly as the ear discerns the melodies of songs, or as the tongue does the flavours of exquisite foods."
 - Maybe that's something that wives will mostly only experience after death but we all do a lot of communicating our feelings and picking up on other people's feelings through touch.
- Of course, touch doesn't just play an important role in marriage relationships: how touch is handled, is an important factor in any human relationship and it even matters in our interactions with other species, like our pets.
- There is lots of evidence that touch also plays a crucial role in parent-child relationships.
 - There is a beautiful description in the teachings of the New Church of how innocence is communicated through touch in a parent-child relationship.
 - *Married Love* §396:3
 - [T]he innocence of parents and the innocence of little children meet through the instrumentality of touch....
- There are heartbreaking studies that demonstrate that children who were not given sufficient nurturing and caring touch when they were growing up, end up having a lot of psychological and social issues later in life.
 - I heard an interview with a person who has spent decades researching the sense of touch and he was saying that touching and being touched seems to be important in children establishing a sense of existing in the world and their relationship with the world (<https://drchatterjee.com/touch-forgotten-sense-professor-francis-mcglone/>).

- If I can touch you and you can touch me then I must exist and you must exist.
 - I find that the sense of touch is also important in that way of re-grounding me.
 - I can get preoccupied with things in my head and the right kind of touch from someone I know and trust can bring me back down to here and a sense of being connected to reality.
 - I think it's part of what was so hard for people during the hard lockdown at the beginning of COVID and it's part of what's so hard for people who are isolated and lonely: there's nobody to touch them and say, "I see you, I feel you, you exist."
- There's actually a physical basis for the role that touch plays in our connections with other people.
 - Apparently we have different kinds of nerve fibres involved in our sense of touch.
 - Some of them are very quick conducting fibres that are necessary for responding quickly to things like something hot.
 - Others are much slower conducting fibres and these ones are most stimulated by gentle, affectionate touch.
 - It's significant to me that the Lord has designed not just for being able to tell what things are and for avoiding getting hurt: He's also designed it so that we can use it to connect and bond with other people.

The Lord and Touch

- It's striking to search for the word "touch" in Bible software.
 - As you go through the Old Testament references where touch is mentioned, it's almost always talking about holy or defiling things that the Children of Israel are not allowed to touch or violent touch.
 - But, as soon as you move into the New Testament, it's full of stories of the Lord touching people and healing them.
- When the disciples try to treat Him as something to be kept away from people, He chastises them and says, "Let the little children come to Me."
- People with unclean contagious diseases like leprosy reach out to Him and He reaches back and touches them and heals them.
 - And He often touches them right where they need healing—He touches their eyes, their ears, their tongues, their hands.
 - This is a question worth reflecting on: where do you need the Lord to heal you?
 - Where do you need Him to reach out to you and touch you and share some of His healing power with you?
- He doesn't just touch them, He also lets them touch Him.
 - Many people are made well just by touching the hem of His garments (Luke 6:19).
 - And He even lets a woman who was known to be a sinner touch him and wash and kiss His feet, even though He knows people will think He shouldn't allow it (Luke 7:36-50).

Conclusion

- Touch is a very powerful sense.
- Today, we've mostly focussed on its power in a positive sense but any power can be misused and abused.
- It's important to remember that one of the commandments is "You shall not covet... anything that is your neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17).
 - Other people's bodies belong to them.
 - Other people's lives belong to them.
 - Even if they are our spouse, or our child, or our family member, or our employee, or whatever they belong to themselves.
 - Their bodies and their sense of touch are meant to serve them in their lives; they are not meant to serve us.
- Every single time we touch someone else or they touch us it is a privilege not a right.
- And the same rules apply when we are on the receiving end.
 - Our bodies belong to us and we get to determine what kind of touch we want and don't want.
 - It is wrong for other people to violate that.
- Obviously there is a whole lot more that we could talk about with this.
 - Again the invitation is out there if any of you would like to talk more about what this topic brought up for you.
- But the point I want to end on is that there are many, many reasons why we might need healing in the area of touch in our lives.
 - Either because of how we have been hurt through touch or how we have caused hurt through touch.
 - In either circumstance, I want you to know that the Lord will not shun you, if you reach out to Him, He will reach back to you, and touch you and help you find the healing that you need.
- *Amen.*

Resource List

The Open Door Crisis Care Centre

24 Hour Support: 031 709 2679

Email: info@opendoor.org.za

Website: <http://opendoor.org.za>

Address: 7 Windsor Rd, Pinetown, Durban, 3620

LifeLine Durban

Crisis Phone: 031 312 2323

E-mail: director@lifelinedurban.org.za

Website: <http://www.lifelinedurban.org.za>

Address: Lifeline: 38 Adrain Road & Annex 20 Percy Osborne Road, Stamford Hill, Durban or
(Call in Services) 23 Stratford Road, Warwick Junction, Durban

Careline Crisis Centre

Emergencies: 082 787 6452

Help Desk: 031 765 1587 or 031 765 1314

Email: admin@carelinecrisis.org

Website: <http://www.carelinecrisis.org>

Address: 36 Assagay Road, Assagay, 3624

Useful Websites

<http://www.sadag.org>

<http://www.gracecounselling.org.za>

<https://www.zazi.org.za/where-get-help.html-0>

<http://www.familylawclinic.org.za>

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

SAPS: 10111

Family Violence/Child Abuse/Sexual Offence: 012 393 2363

CRIME STOP: 0860 010 111

Women Abuse: 0800 150 150

Childline: 0800 055 555

AIDS Helpline: 0800 012 322 or 011 725 6710