

Rev Philippa writes....

Dear friends in Seven Towers,

This time last year Ian and I were privileged to spend a week in the Holy Land, on holiday by the Sea of Galilee. We had never been to the Holy Land before, and it was an amazing experience! We joined a group of about 15 others, led by Bishop John Pritchard, the retired Bishop of Oxford, visiting places where Jesus had lived and taught and worked. It was extraordinary looking at some of these sites and thinking – ‘Jesus was here. I am here.’

One of the places that has particularly stayed in our memory was the settlement of Magdala, where the foundations of a first century synagogue have been discovered and laid out for everyone to see, and beside it, an enormous and beautiful modern church has been built. Above the altar in the Magdala chapel is an immense painting, showing the story of the woman who reached out and touched the hem of Jesus’ clothing, believing that if she could just touch the hem of his robe she would be healed of a bleeding disorder that she had been suffering from for 12 years. The painting shows the view from the ground, and a few inches off the ground, so that what we see is a lot of very large feet, soldiers’ boots, sandals and the bottom of clothing as it brushes the ground.

And **one** finger stretching and straining to touch the hem of a robe, and light shining out from the place where the finger touches the clothing. This is the picture on the front of the magazine this month.

Touch is a very powerful sign of love and concern in our world, though there are quite rightly very important guidelines and rules about what is permissible. Do you remember how the world’s opinions changed when Diana, Princess of Wales held the hands of some people suffering from AIDS in the 1990’s? A priest friend of mine always hugs everyone coming out of the Sunday service at her church – once she has established they’re comfortable with that. And of course she respects anyone who is not, but her thinking is that that hug may be, for some of the elderly and lonely people who came to her church, the only time anyone who is not a health professional touches them.

When Jesus touched people, their lives changed. The woman who touched the hem of his robe was healed of her disorder. Many other people were freed from all sorts of problems – physical, mental, emotional.

One of the verses in the Bible says: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.’

We too can be healed, restored, reconciled by his touch on our lives, not in the same way as when he lived here on earth, and went about among the people, but through the work of his Holy Spirit, working in our hearts and lives and changing them. We all need ongoing healing of something – it might be anger towards someone, or jealousy, or something we cannot forgive, or disappointment in life, or one of many other things.

The good news is that a touch of the love of Jesus in our heart can change us, and we can be restored.

Life in our modern world, though wonderful and exciting in so many ways, is very fast and constantly changing. Our group of churches in Seven Towers is looking to the future and trying to discern what God’s way forward is for us. You may be facing challenges and possible changes in your own life. As you look at the picture on the front of the magazine this month, my prayer is that the love and healing power of Jesus might touch your heart and enable it to open a little to receive that love and gain strength and peace for whatever you face at this time.

With my love and prayers

Rev Philippa x