

KEEPING IN TOUCH

5EpiphB (2/6/94)

Mk.1:35

One thing that friends say (instead of goodbye) is "Keep in touch." Touch is important in our lives -- sometimes a touch does what words cannot do. Witness the comforting touch of friends and family in a time of grief. Notice the hugs and kisses at a wedding celebration. Watch close friends as they carry on a conversation...they can't help but touch each other.

Jesus knew the power of touch and of being in touch. Although his words had the power to heal and to raise from the dead, at times he chose to heal by touching. So it was with Simon's mother-in-law in today's gospel. Jesus took her by the hand, and the fever left her---his was a powerful touch.

Jesus also knew the importance of keeping 'in touch' with His heavenly Father, so he arose before day and went to a lonely place to pray. He was under stress from a long day that began at the synagogue with worship and continued with many healings. What should have been a day of rest became a day of great stress. He evidently had trouble sleeping, even though he was very tired, so he got up before dawn and went to a lonely place. He knew the importance of keeping in touch.

I mentioned how friends say 'Keep in touch'. Most of us have had a dear friend with whom we have lost touch completely. We knew him or her so well that we could finish each other's sentences. We knew them so well that we could read each other's mind. We were sure that we always would be friends, no matter what. We didn't intend to lose touch, but somehow it happened. Now we don't know an address or a phone number, we don't even know whether the person is still alive. How can that tragedy of losing touch happen? It happens because we failed to do what dear ones do along the line....we lost touch.

These simple words about Jesus taking time to be alone to pray remind us of how innocently we can lose touch with God. He was tired and weary, he needed rest. But one thing was more important, to stay in touch with his Father. We get tired, too. We become used to trying to make it through the stresses of life on our own. Prayer becomes a habit that we break; worship becomes less frequent and important to us; and the Bible becomes a closed book rather than the word of God to us. And somewhere along the line, we lose touch with God....not because we wanted to, but because we didn't care enough each day to

'keep in touch'. On Jesus' busiest days of ministry, and at the most troubling times of life, he took time to be alone with his Father, he took time to pray. Scripture records six times when Jesus went away for prayer. His final time away in a lonesome place was at the Garden of Gethsemane.

What effect did it have on Jesus to be in touch with the Father? His time in prayer helped him to see his purpose. This lonely place was for Jesus a place of decision. Would he stay here where he was known and loved, or should he move on, even to a cross? In this time alone with the Father, the answer became obvious. So when Peter and the others criticize him for taking off and say, "Look, let's stay here. The people are looking for you. You're a big hit!" Jesus says, "Let's move on. There are others who need to hear the gospel....for this is what I came to do." He was in touch with the Father's will, and he was at peace in this turmoil.

How might our lives be different if we kept in better touch with God? If our faith were supported by prayer, worship, and scripture like the faith of Jesus, how might we look differently at our purpose? Would we be so likely to take the easy way instead of God's way? Would we be better prepared for the decisions we need to make? In our closing hymn, we will sing, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. We just don't keep in touch. We live in a world that seems to move faster all the time and shouts louder in our ears to 'Do this! Buy that.'" It destroys many with success and many with feelings of failure. We need to be in touch with each other, with ourselves, and with God...and that takes some time away each day...time with those we love, time with ourselves, and time with God. Many have ruined body and soul because they didn't have time to keep in touch.

Today in Holy Communion we have the opportunity to keep in touch with God. We have quiet moments of confession and prayer, time to be renewed in worship and hearing the Word. We can feel and taste the presence of God, in bread and wine, in the touch of those who gather beside us in the pew and at the Lord's table. God wants to keep in touch with us. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." God's wants to be close to us, and gives us opportunity every day, every week, to take some time away to be with

God.

Amazing things happen when we pray and listen. William Willamon tells of a Sunday evening phone call from a parishioner. He said that his daughter Ann had just decided to drop out of pharmacy school. She had been home that weekend and worshipped with her family. The news of her leaving school shocked them. The father pleaded with Pastor Willimon to call her and 'talk some sense into her.' Well, Pastor called her, and reminded her of the time she had put into pharmacy school and how well she had done. He asked, "Why did you decide to make this change?" He was not prepared for her answer: "It was your sermon that started me thinking." She admitted that to be a pharmacist would be a good living and would please her family, but that her most satisfying times were when she volunteered to teach migrant children. That is what she was quitting school to do. There was a long silence on Pastor's end of the telephone, and then he blurted out, "Now, Ann, I was just preaching." Just preaching...but for some that is a time alone that refreshes, that gives peace and changes their lives. May you stay in touch with God every day, even during sermons, and may God's touch lead you do God's will, what is good, and acceptable and right.

+The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep.....