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The Garden Touch

Text: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-3

Some of the first words we humans hear are words of prohibition. Sometimes that prohibition is wrapped in a one or two-word warning.

“Hot!”

“Careful!”

“No”

“Don’t touch.”

In the opening chapters of Genesis, we see touch as experienced by the first humans.

Adam and Eve have been in the Garden, touching vegetation, touching animals... and touching each other. Now, for the first time, it is not good to touch...or so Eve *said*. God did not prohibit the *touching* of the tree. God forbade the *eating* of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). Although the text does not say so, I am guessing that God *encouraged* Adam and Eve to enjoy the Garden through their senses.

* **Smell** the flowers.
* **Touch** the animals.
* **Look** closely at the sky.
* **Hear** the sounds of every winged bird and every creeping thing.
* **Taste** the green herbs and taste the fruits that hang from the verdant trees.

The specific prohibition God gave to Adam had to do with *one* tree. When Eve repeated the prohibition to the serpent, Eve added the word *touch* to the prohibition (3:3). God had permitted touch, perhaps even *encouraged* it. God certainly did not *prohibit* touch.

From this addition to the divine pronouncement and directive to now, we have misconstrued what God said about touch. The same God who came to us in a body, created us to *inhabit* a body and to interact with the world *through* that body. Touch is a privilege and, I dare say, an assignment. According to Eve, God said, “Don’t touch that tree”. However, God said, “Of the tree... you shall not eat”. There’s a huge difference between those two statements. Wallace Stengel, in his novel, *Angle of Repose,* wrote*:*

*Touch. It is touch that is the deadliest enemy of chastity, loyalty, monogamy, gentility with its codes and conventions and restraints. By touch we are betrayed and betray others...an accidental brushing of shoulders or touching of hands...hands laid on shoulders in a gesture of comfort that lies like a thief, that took, not gave, that wanted, not offered, that awoke, not pacified. When one flesh is waiting, there is electricity in the merest contact.[[1]](#footnote-2)*

It is true that touch can be deadly. It is true that “there is electricity in the merest contact.” It is also true that God created us to enjoy His world, and each other, partly through touch.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert, in her book, *Handle With Care,* comments on that quote from Wallace Stegner (“there is electricity in the merest contact”) and writes:

*“* Most of us have felt this electricity in contact with another’s flesh, but because touch is so uncommon in our culture- and in the church- we immediately associate the electricity we feel with *illicit* touch, instead of ministering touch. Weassume if we feel *felt* or if we have *felt* others, then it must be wrong. We suspect sinful motives in others, or we fear our own sinful motives. That fear leads us to instate rules around touch...” Lore Ferguson Wilbert then mentions the rules around touching that we’ve instated. I’ve added some I’ve heard or observed.

* There shall be no forward-facing hugs with members of the opposite sex
* There shall be a maximum of three pats on the back of a person of the same gender.
* Children shall be hugged from the side
* If a person is very attractive, that person shall not be hugged at all.
* If a person is unkempt, greet that person at arm’s length. No touching at all.
* If a person is frail and wrinkled, no touching.

Remember the #metoo movement? We’d better play it safe and not touch anybody at all.

I agree that we should be careful not to have our expressions of affection misinterpreted, but the Garden Touch is a pure touch. Eden is called elsewhere, the garden of God (Genesis 13:10; Ezekiel 28:13). The touching that goes on in Eden is a good touching. Eve, God never told you you couldn’t touch.

Ah, Eden! It is the place where God, according to Genesis 2:9, “made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.” Eden was a sensory paradise. There was soooooooo much to smell, to hear, to taste, to see...and to touch. Warren Wiersbe, commenting on this passage, says that “a ruler can only rule others if he can rule himself, so it was necessary for Adam to be tempted” (Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament).

Proverbs 25:28

*Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.*

We who have been created in the image of God, are not only *permitted* to touch objects and people but we are *encouraged* to do so. The fact that some people have abused the **privilege** of touch does give us permission to ignore the **power** of touch.

Here are two people who were given freedom to obey the God who created them and placed them in paradise. They had the task and the privilege of interacting with the created order. However, to make Paradise work, Adam and Eve had to rule *themselves.* They were given but one exception, one boundary, one prohibition. We do not know the *why* of the restriction. Let’s remind ourselves, again, of the setting.

Genesis 2:15

*Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*

Vs. 16- *Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat....*

I want to suggest that one of the many ways we might respond to God and to His commands regarding earth-keeping is that we learn about, and practice, appropriate touch. I want to call it the Garden Touch. That is, we touch as if we have been given freedom to enjoy all things. The people and objects we touch, we touch carefully...respectfully...lovingly...sensitively.

YOU ALONE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOU ALONE.

**Illus.**

This past week John McAfee was found dead in a prison cell in Barcelona, Spain. Authorities suspect McAfee took his own life. John McAfee is best remembered for developing, in 1987, McAfee antivirus software. McAfee Total Protection offers antivirus, privacy, and identity protection tools. It is a defense against malware (malicious software), ransomware and spyware.

In Eden, God gave to Adam and Eve, all the protection they would ever need from the malware that the evil one was eager to install on their operating systems. They had only to obey and continue enjoying the sensory paradise God had prepared for them They had only to engage the creation through their senses. They could even touch and not be punished.

Let’s get back to Eden and learn to freely touch and be touched. Let us enjoy God’s good, green earth without apology. Let us engage the world through sight, sound, taste, smell... and touch. Let us rejoice that God sees us and has sent us One who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15) and who is neither reluctant nor afraid, to dwell with us.

I want to argue for tactile engagement with God’s creation, which includes objects AND people, all of which we touch appropriately. The Garden Touch.

Prayer

*O God, restore the Garden Touch in us, that we may enjoy your world through our senses. May we express gratitude for that which You have given and enjoy the hands-on opportunities You have, by Your grace, given us. Sensitize us, O God, that where necessary we may keep our hands to ourselves. At the same time, may we enjoy Your grand, beautiful, luscious world. In the name of Jesus who is fairer than the lilies and who is the fragrant Rose of Sharon, who is the One we’ve tasted and seen, we pray.*

Amen

1. Wallace Stegner. *Angle of Repose (*New York: Random House, 1971), 562. Quoted in *Handle With Care* by Lore Ferguson Wilbert [↑](#footnote-ref-2)