

NEED A HUG
[written in oral form]

John 17:1-11
Year A “Ascension Sunday”

May 24, 2020
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A young preacher was asked by a funeral director to hold a graveside service for a man who had lived out in a remote area by himself.
The deceased did not have any family or friends.

The burial site on the man’s rural property was quite a ways from the city. Google Maps did not know where his property was.

On the day of the funeral, the young preacher tried to follow the directions to the place, but somehow got lost.
When he arrived an hour late, he saw a back-hoe and crew, but the hearse and funeral home people were nowhere in sight.
The workmen were eating lunch.

The diligent pastor went to the fresh pile of dirt. The grave was already filled in. Even so, he still gave an impassioned and lengthy committal service.

Returning to his car, the young preacher felt that he had done his duty, and he would leave with a renewed sense of purpose and dedication, in spite of his tardiness.

As he got into his car, he overheard one of the workers talking to another worker: "I've been putting in septic tanks for 20 years, and I have never seen anything like that before.

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His desire and devotion were in the right place, but his physical body was not. Maybe that was good enough? It sure does Not feel right. Something was missing. He was missing.  
His presence was not there. **Good intentions are Not enough.**

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This is much like our situation these days.
We long to be together, face to face.
We desperately want to be "with" loved ones.
We want and Need ...that real "touch" and connection, and not just a Zoom encounter.

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Today is Ascension Sunday, and we did not read the designated passage in Acts 1 describing Jesus’ Glorious ascension.
The presentation is very regal and clinical.
It reads like lawyer's caveat.

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Our Eastertide theme has been "Encountering Jesus", with today's sub-theme being "Praying and Asking."

I do think we are hoping, praying and even groaning for a "real", physical encounter with loved ones.

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In John 17, Jesus was pouring out his heart in saying his farewell. He clearly states his pain and anguish over his pending departure, and cries out his desire for his friends to do well in his absence.

Sadly, at that moment, Jesus was all alone. He was all alone.

I dare say that this prayer is a visceral appeal to hug and be hugged.

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Numerous years ago, after my seminar graduation, a close friend and fellow student stopped by to say good-bye. He was leaving to become a pastor somewhere. Anticipating that moment, I had thought about all the warm and charitable things I would say to him as my good-bye. I would also give him a big hug.

However, when I saw him approach, I got all choked up, and I only shook his hand and walked away. .... The moment begged for a hug.  
*This is an example of good intentions not being good enough.*

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Not long after that, my daughter Jessica, who was then age 15, returned from church camp. I asked her how it was, and she told me about things she did, and then paused.... and added.... "Mrs. Yale was there.... she was one of the cooks.... she was really nice, and when I got stung by a wasp,... She hugged me **like a mother**. It was really nice!"

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I was happy for her, but I think, because I was a single parent, I was a little wounded from her comment.  
*???What did she mean by that..... What was wrong with my hugs???*

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I shared my frustration with my next door neighbour. He had become a good friend. After I told him my reaction, he stated, "Maybe you forgot **how** to hug?" "Maybe you do not know how to hug?"

I responded, "Of COURSE I KNOW HOW TO HUG."

He then petitioned, "I bet you need a hug; let me give you hug."

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OUT in the front of the house, he gave me a hug, AND THEN EXCLAIMED -- "You don't know how **to be hugged**."

I remarked, “WHAT??” – thinking, what I did was a hug.... you know... embrace and then pat on the back.... release

☺ *Some people are back patters and some are not.*  
I come from a family with a long history of back patting  
I thought, that is the way to hug... embrace... “pat” “Pat”... release.  
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He replied, “you’re too stiff, too rigid; you need to relax and receive the hug!”

I thought..... HEY... men aren’t supposed to hug that way!

I was wrong!
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Out on the front lawn.... in front of God and all the neighbours, he talked me through a simple hug.

He said, “RECEIVE IT.... RELAX... hold on, but let go of yourself... Let me comfort you.... ....and let me relax, too.”  
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That day, I learned– “RE-learned” – how to hug.

Real hugging is receiving the comfort. It is NOT a cordial embrace.... It is reaching out and relaxing in the grasp, AND absorbing the empathy..., the compassion!

That is how young children hug...
We need to observe..... We Need to **remember** how a child “hugs.
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A good hug is letting go and holding on. It is an expression of truth from the heart. And, it is healing!

ALL OF US **Need to be hugged....and** we need to hug.  
I’ve heard it said that, everyone, in order to stay healthy NEEDS to be hugged at least 4 times a day.  
\*\* 4 times a day \*\*

Since many people live alone, hugging must be a community responsibility-- a Church Responsibility!

We need to hug.

WE need to hug our children, no matter the age.  
We need to hug our parents, no matter the age.  
We need to hug each other.

We NEED to hug and be hugged, to comfort and be comforted.

As vessels for God, we need to hug.  
And, ..... we all need a good hug, we need to feel God’s comfort.

We need to feel God's love,...through others.

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However,.....we have a big problem right now.

This pandemic has drastically limited the opportunities to hug.
And, we feel that pain. We feel that loss.

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Perhaps, now we can better understand this passage in John 17.

Jesus was All alone.

He was reaching out to God.

He was reaching out to his friends, as if searching for an embrace.

He was alone. And, passionate words are Not enough.

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If you are living with family or friends in isolation, then take advantage of that gift and hug those you are with.

And parents, tell your teenage children to "suck it up."

No, really, tell them that **you need the hug**, and hold on as long as they will let you.

Trust me, they may not admit it, but they will appreciate the hug.

If you are living in a community setting/a retirement situation, try hugging those around you. But, ask first.

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For those living alone and for those separated from loved ones, I can only offer hope.

There will come a time when the Virus Fear will abate.

That time will come.

Hold on, hold on..until then....., and when that opportunity arrives,  
HOLD ON.....Hold on, Hold on.

Something Divine happens with a good hug.

We need to hug. We need to be hugged.

I am pretty sure the day of Jubilee includes, [ ] Singing, Dancing AND hugging.