

Tenth Set - 1. Designed to be Held

There is a story of the fearful child who, during the night, called out for his mother. She came into his room and searched the dark wardrobe to put his mind at rest. He would not be consoled. She checked for lurking (small) monsters under the bed. All to no avail. She spoke to him about the protection of angels and the presence of God all around him. He still refused to be satisfied. Unknowingly echoing the deepest desire within all creation he blurted out, “I want something with skin on.”

When fragile people stand before us, leaden-eyed and hopeless, something tells us that the first thing Jesus would have done is to hold them tenderly. Then their taut bodies would relax, their breathing change and their tears begin to flow. Every day I notice faces that long to be touched. As people come with heavy hearts for a healing conversation or Confession, I think about the last time the anxious edges around their mouths and eyes were traced by a loving hand. Maybe never since childhood. At our ‘anointing meditations’ many people cannot remember a time when someone held their hands or touched their feet so gently.

We are designed to be looked at, to be held, to be enveloped with tenderness. Just as God, according to Celtic folklore, placed a healing for all human illnesses somewhere in the vast variety of creation, so, too, God has built into the miracle of our humanity – mind, body and spirit – the assuaging of open wounds that would otherwise stay bleeding. Divinised twice, first by birth and then by baptism, our bodies are thresholds of God’s peace, embodying and setting free the invisible mystery of divine compassion and hope. That is why God became flesh in the first place.

(Already Within)