

Do not touch me



Noli me Tangere – Titian - 1514

I am jumping to the very end of this set of reflections on the life of Christ: partly because of Easter celebrating the resurrection but more importantly because its title seems so appropriate at this time 'Noli me Tangere' (Do Not Touch me)
Touch is our means of showing love and affection, we all crave it and many are missing it now. These words were spoken to Mary Magdalene when Christ appeared to her in the garden at his Resurrection. Elsewhere, the Bible records that Christ will soon ascend to heaven and send the Holy

Spirit down to his followers: he does not want them to cling to his physical presence.

The story is taken from John's Gospel and is set in the artist's own time and place.

Mary is a typical Venetian beauty, with of course the flowing titian coloured hair which takes its name from this artist.

She encounters the risen Christ, mistaking him for a gardener – symbolised in the picture by the hoe he carries - which quite honestly, I've never found her mistake that surprising, after all her eyes are full of tears and the last time she saw him his body was covered in blood and he was dead.

However, he isn't dressed like a gardener, but in his grave clothes (It is difficult for artists to depict the risen Christ)

The scene is set in an Italian landscape, a very human scene, bringing the image completely down to earth and into the artist's own time; effectively telling the viewer that the Resurrection isn't confined to one time two centuries ago. It is for all time. The tree, the symbol of his sacrifice, joins them, human and divine, with its trunk while Mary kneels on bare earth. Under her hand on the ground is the jar of ointment she has brought to anoint his lifeless body.

Sheep are grazing on the hillside behind him – He is the Good Shepherd whose sheep will recognise him and follow him when he calls them by name.

And it is when he calls "*Mary*" that she instantly recognises him saying "*Rabbouni*" (teacher)

The painting captures this very moment of recognition, as she instinctively moves towards him, reaching across the dividing line formed by the hoe.

He tells her "*Do not hold on to me because I have not yet risen to my father*"

He withdraws from her but at the same time appears to encircle her in a loving protective way with his body and the shroud. His earthly love transformed into something different – something enduring.

The love of Christ survives; it conquers death and gives the promise of eternal life.

This is a painting of celebration and hope; perhaps why, at the height of the Blitz, when Londoners were asked to choose one painting to stay at the National Gallery, when the rest of the collection was taken to Wales for safety it was this painting they chose.

Perhaps a message we can all, Christians and non-Christians alike. take from this painting, as we live in fear of this pandemic, not wanting to touch others, is that we have no need to touch the physical being of Jesus, in order to receive the promise of hope from the risen Christ.

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my

Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her. John 20. 11-18

Refrain: **God raised Christ from the dead,
the Lamb without spot or stain. Alleluia**

1 Blessèd be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who in his great mercy
gave us a new birth as his children.

2 He has raised Jesus Christ from the dead,
so that we have a sure hope in him.

3 We have the promise of an inheritance
that can never be spoilt,
because it is kept for us in heaven.

4 The ransom that was paid to free us
was not paid in silver or gold,

5 But in the precious blood of Christ,
the Lamb without spot or stain.

6 God raised him from the dead and gave him glory
so that we might have faith and hope in God. *1 Peter 1. 3-4, 18-21*

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**God raised Christ from the dead,
the Lamb without spot or stain.**