

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

1045 Old Academy Road
Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

Telephone: 203-259-5596



Date: September 10, 2017
Sermon Title: The Personal Touch
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

"The personal touch." That's basically the motto of our Church: *the personal touch*. I hope you noticed the sketch on the bulletin cover. It's by Diana Rose Smith, a young woman who grew up in our Church. She's now a sophomore at Trinity College in Hartford. Diana is working on a Biblical painting for us, and this was a first sketch, two hands touching, "the personal touch." Maybe that'll be the logo for our Church. The Biblical painting she's doing is about one of the most profound healings that Jesus did, a really important story.

In the Gospel of Mark we are told, "Some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged Jesus to touch him." The Bible says, "So Jesus spit on the blind man's eyes." (Well, now, *that's* a personal touch!) But when he asks the blind man if he can see, the blind man says, "Well, I see people, but they look like trees, walking." That wasn't good enough. Jesus wants us to see and be seen in detail, with specificity, with clarity, with individuality, with personality. So, Jesus touches the man a second time until he sees clearly.

That's the work of our Church, trying to bring life into focus, helping us to see one another. Inside the Church and outside, clearly, as God intended.

The world is increasingly impersonal, isn't it? Automated this, automated that, robocalls. How many times when you make a phone call is there an actual person on the other end? And when your phone rings, how many times is an actual person calling you?

I was reading about the next big thing in sports: "E-sports." You go to Madison Square Garden and watch people play video games on computers. So there's no actual athletic game going on, no flesh-and-blood athletes, running and jumping and hitting and striving. It's all—what would you call it—in the cloud, right? Our world is fast-paced, high-tech, impersonal. There is online education, online funerals, self-driving cars. Before you know it, you'll be able to do anything without going anywhere or being with anybody.

We were talking this week about how long before we have bots in Church or a "robot pastor." It'll be a step in the right direction! Churches are trying all sorts of things, so we have mega-Churches and micro-Churches and Churches in theaters and schools. And there are Churches now where you go to Church, and the preacher isn't even there. They just show up on a big-screen TV from some other location. Now Churches even declare openly on their websites if you want to talk with the pastor, forget about it. They're too busy, too important for you. We are not headed in those directions.

For us, it's personal. We are here in a Church built in the 1850s on properties that first had a Church in 1725, sitting in pews that look as if they're from 1425, worshiping a Jesus who spits in a blind man's eyes to make him better. And it works. So we're going with what works. The "personal touch."

But perhaps I should clear up the "spitting on the eyes" thing, or you'll be ducking every time you see me! In Jesus's time, the idea of spit, like breath, is that it comes from within; it's part of your essence. It's intimate, "personal." In effect, to spit on the blind man's eyes, Jesus went deep into himself to bring about the most "personal touch" possible.

As we begin our new Church year, that's really our promise to you. Every day we go deep into ourselves to be the most real, the most personal we can be for you. Your hurts are our hurts. Your joys are our joys. That's what it meant to be a Church 2,000 years ago. That's what we believe it means to be a Church in the 21st century. "It's still personal."