

THE TOUCHABLE JESUS

John 20:17

By Raymond White

John 20:17 Jesus saith unto [Mary], *Touch me not; For I have not yet ascended to my Father...*

With everything else that we know about Jesus, it's hard to imagine that he could ever be untouchable. This verse in the King James version makes Jesus sound stand-offish, almost in a panic demanding "Don't touch me!" as if there is something wrong with his post-resurrected, pre-ascended body that's fragile and dare not be touched, like he's going to break.

There is another interpretation that makes a whole lot more sense. Let's carefully examine the events of that first Easter morning.

Mary Magdalene and the other women came to the tomb early, (*Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10*). When they saw the open tomb, Mary ran to get Peter and John (*John 20:2*). The other women remained at the tomb, met angels, learned that Jesus had risen, then left. (*Matthew 28:5-8*). Mary returned to the tomb with Peter and John (*John 20:4*). The men left, leaving Mary alone at the tomb weeping. That's when it happened, when the Lord came to Mary and said, "Touch me not." Cold words for one so dear as Mary. But that's not quite what he said, and we can see that by what happens next. The other women were still on the road.

Matthew 28:9 And as they [the other women still on the road] went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

Well, that's different. Is that significant? Yes, it is. Why? Because they touched him. In fact, they were touching him a lot, and this was only minutes after he left Mary at the tomb. Are we to believe that during those minutes that he rushed to heaven and rushed back? That, of course, would be nonsense. The ascension is the ascension, recorded in *Acts 1:9*. There is no other ascension, no pre-ascension.

So, what does it mean? It means that when Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not," he didn't say, "Don't touch me," he said, "Mary, you need to let go. There are other people I need to see before I ascend." In other words, when Jesus said, "Touch me not," that is exactly what she was doing: touching him, holding him, clinging to her savior whom she loved and watched die, and I'm sure she was determined never to let him go again.

When he appeared to her and she responded, "Babboni!" it probably took her a half a second to spring across the short distance that separated them. He probably could not have reflexed fast enough to hold her off and say "Don't touch me." I believe she was all over him before he could say or do anything to prevent her embraces.

The text, *John 20:17*, is better translated as any of these:

"Do not cling to me"	New English Bible
"Stop clinging to me"	New American Standard
"Do not hold onto me"	New International Version

Any of those is a better translation. In other words, “Mary, I must leave, you must let go.” Isn’t that a much sweeter picture, Mary clinging to him still as he needs to go?

Jesus didn’t keep people at arm’s length. He touched people. He touched lepers (*Matthew 8:3*), and blind people (*Matthew 9:29*), and children (*Mark 10:13*), and Thomas (*John 20:27*). And, as always, with a touch, he healed (*Matthew 14:36*).

Does Jesus touch us today? Oh yes. In the most intimate way possible: he is in us and we in him.

John 14:20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

And you can’t get any closer than that.