

TOUCH

Commissioned by St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Sonoma, California

(Allan Robert Petker, 1955-)

Text by Allan Robert Petker,

based on Scripture and Chinese poetry and inspired by the art of He Qi

Multimedia design by Susie Woo

Movement 1—"God Touches Us"

Your caress is so gentle it can hold the smallest child. Your touch is so great it sets the stars in place. Your embrace is so loving it calms the anguished heart. Your reach is so complete it surrounds the world with grace.

When you call me by name I feel your hand take mine. When you anoint my service I receive your guidance. When you befriend the outcast I witness your acceptance. When you send manna from heaven I am nourished by your wonders. When you travel beside me I am blessed by your presence.

When your angels sing "Gloria in Excelsis" I encounter your magnificence. When you clothe yourself in flesh I am overcome with humbleness. When your hands are nailed to the cross I am ashamed. When you break the bonds of death I discover redemption. When you knock upon my door I answer your invitation.

Movement 2—"We Touch God"

And God said! But the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, Lest ye die! And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the cool of the day, And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam And God said! Where art thou?
(Genesis 3:3,8-9)

We want to touch what is beyond our reach To have all doubt and fear removed. Accepting the mystery is where faith begins. To worship is to touch the hem of God.

Then he said to Thomas, "Place thy fingers here and behold my hands And touch now my side, And be not faithless, but be believing."
(John 20:26-29)

Then took Mary a pound of costly ointment And anointed the feet of Jesus And wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with fragrance.
(John 12:3-8)

We want to touch what is beyond our reach To have all doubt and fear removed. Accepting the mystery is where our faith begins. To worship is to touch the hem of God. Alleluia!

Movement 3—"We Touch Each Other"

Dedicated to the Honorable Robert E. Woodward (1914-2008)

Can you cleanse your inner vision Until you see nothing but the light? Can you love people and lead them Without imposing your will?
(poem by Tao Te Ching)

Having without possessing, Acting with no expectations, Leading and not trying to control: This is the supreme virtue.
(poem by Tao Te Ching)

Everything has its beauty, but not everyone sees it. I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand. Our greatest glory is not in never falling, But in getting up every time we do.
(poem by Confucius)

The Lord bless you and keep you, The Lord make his face to shine upon you. The Lord be gracious unto you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you And give you peace. Amen.
(Numbers 6:22-26)

Dr. He Qi was among the many people sent to the countryside during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. As a young man, he escaped hard labor by painting pictures of chairman Mao Zedong. During those years, he once found a copy of Renaissance artist Raphael's Madonna and Child in a magazine, and was so moved by it, that he began to paint copies of it at night.

He Qi earned a doctorate in religious art from Nanjing Art Institute, having studied medieval art in Hamburg, Germany. He was a professor of Christian Art at Nanjing Theological Seminary before moving to St. Paul, Minnesota in 2004.

One can better understand the art of He Qi when it is seen as a reinterpretation of sacred art within an ancient Chinese art idiom. Chinese religious art, being an expression of Buddhism, was historically typified as a tranquil and utopian portrayal of nature, often painted with black ink and water. He Qi is especially influenced by the simple and beautiful artwork of the people in rural China. Within that framework, he seeks to redefine the relationship between people and spirituality with bold colors, embellished shapes and thick strokes. His work is a blend of Chinese folk art and traditional painting technique with the iconography of the Western Middle Ages and Modern Art.