

His healing touch

Mark 4:35-41

Today's address is based on the Gospel from Mark and is a melding together by Cathy Beaton of two sermons provided by the LCA's Worship Resources: the lay reading sermon for this Sunday and a sermon by Pastor Roger Atze.

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

In these verses, Mark uses a bookending or sandwich approach where he places a story in the middle of another story. Here, the stories of the young girl and the woman come together to illustrate powerfully Jesus' supreme rule over life and death.

In the healing of Jairus' daughter, Jesus is revealed here for the first time as having power over death. At the same time, in the story of the woman with persistent bleeding, Jesus allows himself to be touched in order to offer her healing and wholeness, new life. Here we are reminded that not only do we worship a God of infinite power, but one of immeasurable compassion and tenderness who is sensitive to our sufferings.

In our Gospel passage, we see how actions and words of simple faith – or perhaps desperation – transform lives. Our faith does not need to be refined, eloquent or shaped in the traditional wording of the creeds to be worthy of notice. We can be rich or poor, have everything or nothing, be distinguished or destitute, and still God hears every sigh, every deep and heartfelt longing as prayer, even if it comes only because we have nowhere else to turn.

We don't know how long Jairus' daughter has been ill; maybe weeks, perhaps only days. Without a doubt, her situation was serious and life-threatening. Jairus comes to our Lord full of faith and hope, pleading earnestly as he humbly kneels at Jesus' feet: **"My little daughter is dying. Please come and put Your hands on her so that she will be healed and live"**. Imagine his relief when Jesus agrees to come and they set off, with the crowd in tow.



This story is then put 'on hold', kind of a 'hold that thought', while Mark introduces another story with the sick woman.

Let's look a little more closely at this woman whose whole life had been impacted by her serious health problem. We are told that she had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. Not only could the doctors not help her situation, they just added to her suffering. Poor woman! What's more, her money had run out. With every hope, every human source of alleviating her illness gone, I imagine she was at the end of her tether (as my Mum would say).

But when she heard about Jesus, she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Here in Jesus, God himself was at work. If she could sneak up from behind unnoticed and touch his

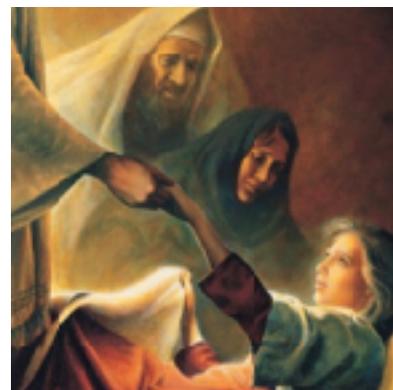


garments, she would be ok. She wouldn't have to disclose to everyone what her illness was, and all would be well. Without being noticed and without a word spoken, she touches Jesus' clothes, and immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

Jesus is aware of the difference between an accidental touch from someone in the crowd around him and a touch made out of desperate need for his help. Jesus asks **“Who touched my clothes?”** in order to enter into a personal relationship with her and give her more than physical healing. Overwhelmed at being healed by Jesus, she now kneels before our Lord in fear and trembling. She had been caught out. She now shares with Jesus all she has been through and her passionate hope that Jesus could make a difference in her life.

But to her amazement, instead of being judged or condemned she hears Jesus say to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." Here the Greek translation for healed is 'saved you'. This Jesus – God – had allowed her to touch him and receive what she so desperately needed. He has done far beyond what she was able to even hope to receive: not only did he heal her, but he accepted her and gave her his peace. She was now not only whole and healthy physically, but spiritually as well. Though she was helpless and hopeless, through acting in faith and reaching out for Jesus, she now had healing, and could go in peace.

Meanwhile, Jairus hears news no parent ever wants to hear: **“Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore?”** We can easily imagine all the thoughts of despair that rush through Jairus' mind. Little does Jairus know that because of the delay, he will see an even greater miracle: the raising of his daughter from death. We need to keep on believing in Jesus just when it's hardest to do so. Hence, Jesus urges Jairus: **“Keep on believing.”** Jairus now discovers that Jesus can do far more for his daughter than he ever imagined. Jesus can remove our crippling fear of death and dying. The early Christians lived every week in the light of Easter. Christianity was for them a death-conquering faith. Every Sunday reminded them of that.



The blessings and consequences of Easter are so immense that we need 52 Sundays each year to begin to do justice to this event which shapes our future destiny. Worship each Sunday is God's gift to us to keep alive and strengthen our hope for **“the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”** Our Saviour can do more, so much more for us than we believe He can.

Jesus brought peace and life to people who had no hope of either. And it is this same Jesus who comes to us today, with the same words of peace and life. Jesus accepts each one of us, and we can be touched, comforted and healed by His love.

Worship is one place where God clearly touches us. He comes to each of us, granting us forgiveness of sins and giving us the assurance of life and salvation. He comes to extend his peace to us so that we can go through life with that 'peace which passes all understanding'.

Think about it: we too, like Jairus, his daughter and the woman, are again and again at the end of our tether. We, too, have exhausted all human possibilities of being able to have the wholeness and

peace in our lives that we know should be there. Too many things in the past weeks, months and years have crushed us and caused us suffering.

So we reach out, we come in faith (whether minuscule or great), seeking God's healing, longing for his touch and his power: longing for the freedom to again go forward and live. We tremble with fear at the prospect of going away no better than we came. But we come because we know that it is he alone who can help us.



God reaches out and touches us in and through our worship today. We see the cross, which reminds us of a God who has suffered in our place, who died our death. Who rose again. Yes, here is our God who knows our pain and our hurt. He came to be with us, to free us, and to offer us life.

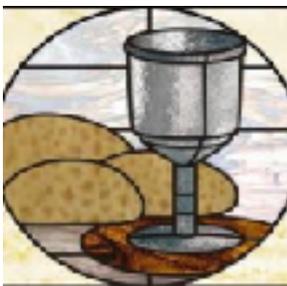
We are touched as worship begins, when we are not only reminded of our baptism into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; but here is a reminder that this loving, forgiving God is here in our very

midst and his name is placed on each one of us.



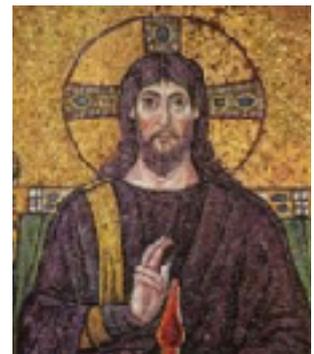
Through confession, our troubles are laid bare before God, so that he can deal with them. And he does! Jesus touches us as forgiveness is pronounced, and our sin is removed so that we can live at peace with our God, here in this very service.

From there he leads us into his Word, so that the things he wants us to know, can touch us and encourage us. He continually leads us through Law and Gospel to see and know Jesus Christ and all that he has done for us through his life, death and resurrection. He reminds us of the healing, hope and power that he has won for us. He encourages us forward into the coming week to again live and be the people that he wants us to be, so that others in the community around us can see and know the Good News of Jesus Christ also. He wants to touch them through us.



Before he does, however, he invites us to his table, to a special feast so that he can touch us in a very real way. He invites us to join with him, the angels and all the faithful who have gone before us. All, so that he can give himself: his very body and blood which he shed on the cross, so that we can know that we are forgiven and that eternal life with God in heaven has been won for us.

Then once again, before we leave, he places his touch on us. Through the Benediction he gives his blessing to us, so that we can go forward with confidence and certainty to face the week ahead. No matter how bad things were when we arrived, we now are healed: forgiven and given life and the free gift of salvation. We have been made whole. Now we are at peace with God; and we can go in peace once again.



Yes, the world out there is still going to be tough. We still have a sinful nature and the consequences of sin will be ever around us. But now we know, God's touch has the final say in our life. Now we know that we are loved, forgiven and assured of eternal life, no matter what the devil, the world, and our sinful self can throw at us. Now nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

As we came here to seek his help, we have come into contact with his touch, and have been given healing and wholeness. God has again touched us so that we can go in peace. To him be all glory and honour, now and forever. Amen.