

Bonnie Sermon

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Finding Your Power; Listening for Healing

Mark 5:24-34

We began the week we offering prayers for healing. Three of this faith fellowship underwent surgery to bring healing and wholeness to their lives. Birney, Michele and Mary Jane all took a risk placing their bodies and their well-being in the hands of medical teams and surgeons to help them regain wholeness and healing in their lives. They put their trust in the medical teams for physical healing and they put their trust in us to sustain them through our prayers offered to God the ultimate healer, both and intimate dependence on the other. They are now on the other side of surgery but their healing continues: physically, emotional and spiritually. The power of pray is and will be essential to the process of their healing and the many persons that we pray for whom only God is in touch with. Most often, when folks learn that they have been and are being prayed for, their response is, "I feel the prayers and they are giving me strength." The touch of prayer

The path to healing is often surprising and as healing stories goes this is a strange story. The story of healing of the woman bleeding is within another healing story. Jesus heads out to help a high official of the synagogue whose daughter is ill, and on the way, he encounters a woman with a hemorrhage. Her illness had alienated her from husband (if she had one) as well as family, community, and religion. She was a social and spiritual outcast and, like many people today, impoverished by the cost of health care. (*She spent all that she had.*) Perhaps she even internalized the social judgments heaped upon her, wondering if somehow she might have committed a sin that led to her ailment or if God was punishing her for some sin of which she was unaware. For her, the opportunity for the healing moment was now! She had heard about Jesus healing others, why not her, why not now. In her desperation, she found the courage the power to face the crowds, the stares, the comments, even the risk of rejection from the healer. This was her time and she would not let it pass. It was now or never and she pushed her way toward the healer, guided and sustained by her affirmation, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." She took a huge risk. Her future depended on it. She could have been killed for shoving her way through a crowd; she found an inner strength to move beyond all the obstacles; a menstruating woman ritually unclean and that was hugely important in first century Israel. She broke all the rules and so did Jesus by healing her.

When she touches Jesus, the healing energy is released. A power flows from Jesus that heals her body as well as her soul. The power is so great that it unsettles the healer, who looks all around for the recipient of his energy. Healed, she comes to him, elated but filled with fear and trembling at what she just experienced. How would Jesus respond to her? Mark tells us that she threw herself at Jesus' feet in fear and trembling. But instead of calling her "unclean," Jesus names her; "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Instead of admonishing her outrageous trespass, Jesus praises her faith, her risk taking behavior. Instead of justifiable anger, Jesus bids her go in peace.

Thankfully, this, like so many of Jesus' healings, is many-faceted. Her faith is a factor, but not the only factor in her healing. This passage might be misused if we see the healing as fully dependent on her faith. The question in our human condition always arises regarding those that are not healed. By inference, those who are not healed somehow lack the faith that transformed this woman's life. In truth, her healing came from a divine intersection of her faith and God's power. Her faith opened the door to the healing power residing in the healer. Healing is not about us. Healing is a connection of our faith, the faith of others, our condition and previous behavior, the nature of the illness and medical responses, and God's ever-present goal of abundant life. So much is at play in this story, she claimed the power within her to risk reaching out so that all of the connections might proceed. In the intimacy of that touch wholeness, healing and peace come to the woman. She is named 'Daughter' precious child of God by Jesus.

A poignant negative illustration of the power of healing and touch is offered by Andrew Purves. "Psychologists long speculated about how children utterly cut off from human relationships might develop. Their speculations were tragically confirmed in the 1980's when the numerous orphanages of (Cesque's) Ceausescu's Communist Romania were opened to the world after his fall from power. This dictator had mandated bizarre social policies that resulted in thousands of unwanted children ending up in under-funded state orphanages, where they were completely isolated, often receiving no love, in fact no human touch at all. Tragically, although the children grew into physical human creatures, they did not become human persons. They could not speak; could not relate to other and could not give or receive affection.

As God's children, we are, created, shaped and made human in and through relationship to other persons. Our relationships in the church, in friendship, and in our families are not just add-ons to life for distraction and entertainment. We become complete human-beings, we are named through relationship with God and others. God calls us to ignore the taboo of class or boundary for Christ's sake because Christ has shown us that the needs of people take precedence over the laws of purity (Lev. 15), and the boundaries of hate that function to keep us apart. If we are going to listen for healing and wholeness, if you and I are going to claim the power to follow Jesus, we will need to cross the boundaries of ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation or even politics because on the other side there just might be a bleeding person hidden in the crowd or dying children waiting to be loved and fed—interruptions that are really God's agenda."

God's agenda is always about relationship and being transformed by the power of God's love. The power of healing is in the listening, the reaching and the touching. Let me share with you a portion of a newsletter article called Touched in Church by David E. Leininger Christian Globe. I remember when we used to come to church and leave untouched. Now I have to be nervous about what's expected of me. I have to worry about responding to the person sitting next to me. What is all this touching in church? It used to be a person could come to church and sit in the pew and not be bothered by all this friendliness and certainly not by touching.

I've heard people say that I wish church could be the way it used to be. What is it with all of this touching? I once just asked the person next to me: How are you? And the person would answer: Oh, just fine, and we'd both go home... strangers who have known each other for twenty years.

But now the pastor asks us to look at each other. I'm worried about that hurt look I saw in that woman's eyes. Now I'm concerned, because when the minister asks us to greet one another, the man next to me held my hand so tightly I wondered if he had been touched in years.

Now I'm upset because the lady next to me cried and then apologized and said it was because I was so kind and that she needed a friend right now. Now I have to get involved. Now I have to suffer when this community suffers. Now I have to be more than a person coming to observe a service.

That man last week told me I'd never know how much I'd touched his life. All I did was smile and tell him I understood what it was to be lonely. Lord, I'm not big enough to touch and be touched! The stretching scares me. What if I disappoint somebody? What if I'm too pushy? What if I cling too much? What if somebody ignores me?

"Pass the peace." "The peace of Christ be with you." "And also with you." And mean it. Lord, I can't resist meaning it! I'm touched by it, I'm enveloped by it! I find I do care about that person next to me! I find I AM involved! And I'm scared.

O Lord, be here beside me. You touch me, Lord, so that I can touch and be touched! So that I can care and be cared for! So that I can share my life with all those others that belong to you! All this touching in church -- Lord, it's changing me! What was it our audacious friend said so many centuries ago? "If I but touch...I will be healed." -

In a few moments we will have the opportunity to share together a prayer for reconciliation and forgiveness. It is a prayer that asks us to examine who we are within our in most selves and amongst our neighbors. It is a prayer that calls us to move beyond the barriers that would leave us less than whole. It is a prayer that does not ask for perfection but for an opportunity to be who God intends us to be as his people. May we find the strength to risk the touch of our through our neighbor. May we risk being the touch of God to our neighbor. May we be healed; made whole in Christ. May we then offer the peace of Christ, the touch of Christ with our neighbor. Christ has called us and proclaimed, "Daughter/Son, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed and be God's touch to another in need!"

In Madeline L'Engle's *A Wind at the Door* angel, Progo, is sent to enlist Meg's help in the cosmic battle between good and evil. Meg's challenge is to be a "Namer." When Meg asks the angel what that means, he fumes, "I've told you. A Namer knows who people are and who they are meant to be. When people don't know who they are, they are open to being annihilated by hate. If someone knows who he is, really knows, then he does not need to hate." Once we are able to see the image of God in our neighbors, once we recognize their inherent value, we strive to help them become who they are meant to be. We "name" them. Or as Mr. Rogers summed it up: "To be able to be accepted for who we are and to be able to grow from there is one of the greatest treasures of life."

Les Mis

Fantine:
Come with me
Where chains will never bind you
All your grief at last at last behind you
Lord in heaven, look down on him in mercy!

Valjean:
Forgive me all my trespasses
And take me to your glory

Eponine & Fantine:
Take my hand, and lead me to salvation
Take my love, for love is everlasting
(Valjean joins)
And remember the truth that once was spoken
To love another person is to see the face of God!

Chorus:
Do you hear the people sing?
Lost in the valley of the night
It is the music of a people who are climbing to the light
For the wretched of the earth there is a flame that never dies
Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.
They will live again in freedom in the garden of the Lord

When Jairus and the Woman Heard

When Jairus and the woman heard
Of Jesus, there was nothing that deterred
Them both from bowing low before the one
Who'd heal where they had come undone.

Who knows where else they'd gone to find
Not only healing, nor just peace of mind,
But someone with the kind of love that saves,
Not that which just attention craves.

This little girl just twelve years old,
This woman, who, for twelve years unconsoled,
This girl, though dead, the Lord not loathe to touch,
This one who touched, and risked so much;

These two reborn, both at twelve years,
Reveal propriety is far less dear
To God than we, called like the Twelve, surmise;
Great grace is always such surprise!