

June 28, 2009  
Lectionary 13b  
Mark 5:21-43  
Pr. Craig M. Mueller

## ***OUT OF TOUCH***

*Reach out and touch someone.* It's the famous tagline for AT&T that goes back thirty years. Even before that was the Diana Ross hit song with these lyrics: *reach out and touch somebody's hand / make this world a better place.*

When we are lonely or in great distress, we reach out to others. The two main characters in today's gospel seem almost desperate as they reach out to Jesus. Jairus is a respected, synagogue leader and though his peers are skeptical about Jesus, he decides to reach out, nonetheless. His daughter is near death. He begs Jesus to touch his daughter that she may be made well and live.

And there is the nameless woman who is ritually unclean and, thus, cut-off from her community. For twelve years she has lived with a flow of blood that put her on the fringes. Out of such isolation and loneliness she approaches Jesus. She believes if she can simply touch his garment, she will be made well.

The closer we come to crisis, the greater the temptation to react with despair or desperation. There are times when we want the best medical, spiritual or therapeutic care possible, to do anything we can to get better. When Apple CEO Steve Jobs needed a liver transplant he went to Tennessee where the wait was 48 days rather than the national average of 306 days. But some wondered whether his wealth and name gave him an advantage over others.

The gospel interweaves the stories of Jairus and his twelve-year old daughter and the woman who has been suffering for twelve years. I counted up eight references to touch in the stories. Jesus reveals compassion as he takes the girl's hand and restores her to life. The woman receives a flow of divine power as she touches Jesus.

Many of us are out of touch with our bodies. Stress takes its toll and we crave a touch that will bring healing and restoration.

Our bodies carry memories even if our minds have forgotten. One therapist called it "muscle memory." Within our bodies is the memory of the physical and emotional pain and trauma from our lives. That's why being touched in a different way, such as in a massage, may trigger an emotional response such as tears.

Rachel Naomi Remen is a physician who believes we have "lost touch," so to speak, and works to humanize the world of medicine. She tells a story about a woman named Jessie who suffered a temporary bowel obstruction that had been caused by the radiation used to treat her cancer. To deal with the pain Jessie packed an over-night bag and drove twenty-five miles to the hospital. She had to stop several times to vomit. She spent an entire day in the emergency room. But through it all Jessie didn't call any of her friends. She said they were all working and, after all, they didn't know anything about intestinal obstruction.

But one of her friends reminded Jessie that children instinctively run and reach out to others when they fall down. Jessie replied, "Yes, I've never understood that. It's so silly. Kissing the boo-boo doesn't help the pain at all." Stunned, her friend said, "Jessie, it doesn't help the pain, it helps the loneliness."<sup>1</sup>

Did you grow up with a Christianity that was out of touch with the body, as if we were to transcend our physical selves for some kind of spiritual other-worldliness? I did and now I consider such thinking heretical!

Our bodies are a gift of God. Our sense of touch and the ways we share intimacy are at the heart of what it means to be human. Perhaps the pride parade several hours from now is making a statement: our sexuality is intrinsic to who we are. To love and to be loved and to form relationships is a fundamental human right.

For several decades many churches have been conducting healing services. Yes, for those we know and love living with specific illnesses. But also for all of us living with brokenness or pain of one kind or another.

What kind of stress are you carrying in your body? Maybe you were told your body or its desires were sinful. Or that who you are or how you love is wrong. Maybe your body has been abused or violated. Or you have faced an illness or a broken heart that has left you wondering how you could go on. Maybe you or someone you love is living with a terminal illness. Or simply the aches and pains of getting older. Maybe you can't get pregnant or a miscarriage has shattered your dreams. Or you are facing a fractured relationship, an addiction, a depression. Maybe you simply wonder if you are loveable. Or attractive. Or whether God can forgive a discretion in your past.

We touch one another with the sign of peace. When we come together as the body of Christ and get to know each other, we find that we are all carrying something: sadness, fear, loneliness or grief. When we kiss the boo-boo it doesn't take away the pain. But it brings another kind of healing.

At this table we receive Christ's very body and blood for our own healing. After sharing the bread and wine of communion you will have the option of receiving a cross made with oil on your forehead. We could just say healing words to you. But Jesus touched people. And there is healing power in touch. It is a reminder that our bodies are good. That we are a unity of mind, body and spirit. And amid whatever hardships and suffering we face, God promises to be with us. To kiss our broken places and make us whole.

<sup>1</sup>Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996) pp. 59-60.