



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

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“He Touched Me” Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 8:40-56 HEALING MINISTRY

Over recent weeks, we’ve been listening for God Word about worship, the parts we do from week to week, as well as on special occasions. We’ve looked at praise and music and singing and giving and living itself as worship. Today, on this second Sunday in October, when we offer our healing ministry, we look at “healing” in worship. And of course, we start with Jesus, the Healer.

I’m going to read a brief section from Matthew’s gospel (which will be on the screen), and then I’ll ask you to turn to Luke 8 for another pericope which is a double story, and it will be most useful to have you in your own Bible there. Both of these are healing stories. Let’s see what God might be saying to us today, first from Matthew 8:14-17. *[text]*

One wag said of this account, “See, it’s the same old story. As soon as the woman gets up, she has to start waiting on the men.”

The next account is a “two-fer”, with two incidents woven together. I’m going to read through it once, and then we’ll dive in. Listen for God’s Word TO US TODAY, in Luke 8:40-56. *[text]*

OK. What do you notice? Jesus has just come back across Lake Galilee after healing the demon-possessed man near Gerasa.

A ruler, or president, of the local synagogue approaches him. He was “an administrator, charged with supervision of all matters pertaining to the synagogue. He was not a dictator over the congregation. He was elected by the board of elders to oversee the worship services and the upkeep of the building. He chose the men to read the Scriptures, to offer prayer, and to preach or explain the Scripture for each meeting. If discipline was called for, the ruler of the synagogue could reprimand or excommunicate a member (John 9:22; 16:2), or even order that a scourging or a whipping be carried out (Matt. 10:17; Mark 13:9).” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary) His name was Jairus, and he begs Jesus to come and heal his daughter who is sick at home – so sick, it was clear to everyone she was near death.

Jesus goes. He doesn’t say “Yes”, or ask questions; he doesn’t debate the worthiness of using his time for this “case”. I am guessing Jesus is responding to the crushing pain of this father who is helpless, and willing to try anything to save the life of the daughter he loves. At twelve, the text says, she would be right at the age to be married. So any hopes the father has held for his little girl were now in peril, just at the point where he had hoped to bless some lucky young man with a new wife, and see his little girl happy, a mother herself.

Then there's an interruption. Jesus is on the move, but the crowd who had been waiting for him has also invited themselves along, and the whole mob is starting to move off toward Jairus' house. But one in the crowd is on a mission. She HAS TO get to Jesus. She's been hemorrhaging for twelve years. What's it like to be losing blood for twelve years?! How much harder her heart has to work, just to keep her alive. Every day she wakes up tired, and goes to bed tired. She's probably depressed, too, for there's a religious and social dimension to this. That fact that she's always shedding blood has made her ritually unclean; the law of Moses in Leviticus 15:25-30. " 'When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. On the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to sacrifice one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement for her before the Lord for the uncleanness of her discharge.' "

Now, think about that. True, people up north in Galilee were not as strict about a lot of things as people down south in Judea and Jerusalem, but think of the isolation for this woman. She is truly untouchable; and her ritual uncleanness is "contagious", you might say. So she's sick, weak, and avoided by everyone -- and this has been her life for twelve years?!

How desperate can you get in twelve years? Some manuscripts of this passage harmonize with the account in Mark, where it says she had spent all her money on physicians, but was no better -- in fact she had become worse. This author, Luke, is himself a physician, and he omits that detail, lest it distract from the focus on the healing Jesus gives. But let's take this detail as original. So on top of anything else, she is broke. She is like the 46 million Americans without health insurance, besides the many millions more of us who are underinsured. Her illness has bankrupted her, just as it has done to millions more these days, made so much worse by the sinking economy. She is in a world of hurt. Pretty hopeless.

But then, she hears about Jesus. "Oh God," she prays, "help me get to him."

She doesn't have to look hard to find the crowd gathering where Jesus had left to go east across the Lake, and was expected back here any time now. There he is! But the crowd has grown, and *everyone* wants to see Jesus, to be near him, near enough to hear his voice, for sure. And the mob starts moving off. Her chance to come to Jesus is moving away. Desperately, tears in her eyes, she pulls her way through the crowd, keeping low so people won't recognize her. Then she sees the fringe of Jesus' prayer shawl -- that's really what the text says -- and she lunges forward with her last strength, just to touch it, touch him -- something!

And she feels it, instantly. Something is different. Her pulse is stronger, and not just from the effort she's expended. But Jesus, too, has sensed the difference. He starts looking around: "Who touched me?" he asks. His disciples are -- first, surprised, because they didn't notice anything; and second, wondering why Jesus hasn't noticed that this moving mob has been crushing around him ever since they landed the boat. "Everyone's been touching you, Master," they say. "Of course, 'someone touched you'!"

No, but this is different. Jesus has been looking around at head level, and not finding anyone obvious he looks down, and there, among the people and their dusty robes, lies this woman, perhaps 8 or 10 feet away. Now, of course, everyone follows Jesus' gaze, and now all eyes stare at her. She takes a big gulp of air, lifts herself up for a step or two, and falls at Jesus' feet. And her words start tumbling out through her tears – all the sickness, weakness, isolation, discouragement for all these years. “And I thought, if I could just get to you, . . . So I prayed, and here you came, and I could not miss this chance and somehow there was a space for me to get by, and I reached out and grabbed your prayer shawl. I'm so sorry. But I was healed. I know it. I am healed!”

She's going to go on for some time, but Jesus stoops to her, puts his hand upon her lips and she grows quiet. Tenderly, firmly, directly Jesus says to her, “My daughter, you were right to trust in God this way. Go in peace and wholeness. You are well, indeed.”

But even as Jesus is saying this to her, someone from Jairus' house runs up to Jairus' (remember Jairus?) and says to him, “Oh, Master, I'm so sorry. Your little girl has died. Come home, now. They need you. You don't have to bother the teacher any more.”

Well, of course, Jairus has been leading Jesus to his house, and Jesus heard every word of this. He looks up from his stoop near this now-healed woman whose faith has made healing happen and says, “Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” Same words.

When the synagogue president's servant says, “Don't bother the teacher,” it's because no one thinks a teacher or itinerant rabbi will be of help any more – if he ever would have been of help. In fact, when Jairus had told his household he was going to look for Jesus, they were surprised. “Why?” they wondered. “What could he do to heal our little flower?” But of course, it's long past that now. The girl is dead. *Uh, Jesus—you don't understand. Healing would have been great, but now it's too little, too late. Please, don't bother.*

Jesus stands up, perhaps helping the woman to stand, too, and Jesus continues in the direction they've been going. “What's this?” the crowd wonders.

They get to Jairus' house, and outside the extended family has begun to arrive for a funeral. In the Middle East, even today, funerals and burial were performed on the same day as a death – that is, before sunset. Much of the day here with Jesus has already gone. And not only the family has arrived, but the family has already hired the professional mourners that were engaged for these things. They were part of the grief ritual. Their exaggerated dirges were designed to help the family not feel alone, but feel surrounded by others who grieved, too.

Jesus is about to go in with just his inner circle of Peter, James and John, as well as the girl's parents. He stops at the doorway, and looks at the family and hired mourners, and bellows over their wailing, “Cut it out! She is not dead, just asleep.” How can you react to such nonsense? They've seen the girl laid out on a funeral pallet, as dead as a post. So, they laugh.

Jesus turns and goes inside. He sees the girl on the bier, he gently takes her hand and lifts it up straight above her body, and in a firm voice to wake a sleeper, says, “My child, get up!” Her eyes flicker open. She takes a breath. Everyone is stunned. Jesus tugs on her hand to signal, ‘get up’, and she sits up, pivots, and straightens out her legs and rises up. This is her own personal resurrection (and it's the same word in the text). The five other adults in the little room are blown away. Jesus has to bring them back to “now” from the “eternity” they've been in.

“Hey,” he says, “come on; give her something to eat.” And the mother springs into action, grabbing something from the kitchen. Then they all start speaking at once, and Jesus “shushes” them. “Don’t talk about this,” Jesus says, “because people will just not understand.”

Whew! Did you notice how prominent “touch” is with Jesus? He touches Peter’s mother in law (which means – right? – that Peter was married). A woman touches him – but Jesus “owns” that touch; power has gone from him to her. Jesus grasps the hand of the young girl who was dead. Both of these last two touches would have made Jesus unfit to enter a worship service – ritually unclean. But he didn’t care. It wasn’t about him; it was about another’s need, as God directed.

Touch. A lot of people around you are starved for touch. Bessie Eichorn, one of our former members, was a great advocate of “holy hugs”. As more of us live alone, or as we isolate ourselves with our ipods and computers and X-Boxes, we begin to crave touch even more, and if we don’t get it, we start to shrivel or get twisted. We need touch to be well.

When you visit someone in a hospital or abed at home, move up a chair so you can touch their hand, or grip it in some way. Even that little bit can be life-giving. Touch connects people to life.

Today I’ve dramatized the Scriptures, but there’s a point of application on the other side of this dramatic coin. Each of these people – and those who really cared about them – really wanted Jesus. The disciples Jesus called to go with him – they really wanted to study with Jesus.

A song from 1922 sings, in the words of Rhea Miller, “I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold, riches untold, men’s applause, worldwide fame I’d rather have Jesus than anything this world [can give] today.” I don’t know very many Christians who would care to sing those words, and really mean them. For most of us, even with the economy in the tank, our problems are not so pressing that we are desperate for God. We don’t need Jesus *that* much. We’re getting by OK. Our sickness is not *that* bad. Our sin is – well, we’re good people.

This is where the evangelical emphasis on a “decision for Christ” (or the mainline church emphasis on “church membership”) does not serve the cause of Christ well. In Matthew 28, Jesus’ last words were, “Go, make disciples. . .” He didn’t command us to “go, make decisions.” I’m an evangelical, but “praying the sinner’s prayer” and “asking Jesus into your heart” is just the start of a life-long discipleship journey *that Jesus leads*. Our “decision for Christ” enrolls us in a disciple apprenticeship program, but many of us have failed to show up for instruction and the first simple tasks as his followers. We may have been “touched by an angel”, but we are not in touch with the One who sent the angel. We ask God for help, but we are deaf to God’s call when He asks for volunteers for Kingdom work. We have reduced God to a concept. But God is -- you should excuse this inevitable distortion – God is a Person – three Persons, in fact – Whom we choose to ignore every day as they call us to imitate Christ, to grow up to maturity, to faithfully follow *where Jesus takes us*.

I see so many people walk away from a Jesus they’ve never known, and it’s so sad. Life is moving along smoothly for them, and I don’t want to really pray, “Lord, make their lives so painful that they HAVE TO cling to You.” No, I don’t. I don’t. I don’t. Really. . . .

Jesus touched you? Terrific! Praise the Lord! But are you in touch, right now, with Him? If not, then you're not well. You have settled for a half-alive life. Why wouldn't you want all that God wants to give you?

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on October 11, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]