

The Healing Touch, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 04090628
2 Corinthians 8:7-15 and Mark 5:21-43
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 28 June, 2009

We have, in our Gospel reading, two stories of Jesus' healing. Jairus was the leader of the synagogue in the town of Capernaum where Jesus and the disciples had made their headquarters. Here was a man of considerable importance. He was used to giving orders. Mark says he fell at Jesus' feet and begged him, not just once, but repeatedly, to heal his daughter.

This was quite an admission on the part of Jairus. He respected Jesus' power to heal. He believed that all Jesus needed to do was lay his hand on his daughter and she would be made well and live.

Many of us know what it is like to have a sick son or daughter. When a child has a fever, we go to great lengths to find out what's wrong and to get treatment. We want to do all we can to get the child assistance. It is one of the most painful events of life to watch a child suffer and not be able to cure the suffering. Most of us would trade places with a suffering child if we could. Such were the feelings of Jairus. You can imagine Jairus' grabbing Jesus by the arm and saying, "Come on, let's go, before it's too late." So, Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed them. We must remember how popular Jesus was. Many crowded around him, sort of the way people crowd around pop music stars today. In that crowd was a woman who had been suffering hemorrhages for years. She had been bleeding twelve years. She had spent lots of money with lots of doctors. The doctors had not healed her, but were glad to take her money.

Now it's bad enough to suffer bleeding for that length of time. To lose blood like that saps one of strength. She had to have been anemic. She would have been tired all the time. She would have had to wash her clothes frequently. It would be downright irritating. But, in addition to all that, according to the law, the woman would have been an outcast. It was taboo to touch blood, for blood represented life. This woman's life blood was bleeding out of her. It was taboo to touch a woman who was bleeding. She would not have been allowed into the synagogue because of her ailment. So it was with women back in Jesus' time.

So it is with women in many places today. In describing the events in Iran this past week, one commentator, a native Iranian, said, "if you want to know how things are progressing in Iran, pay attention to what is happening to the women."¹ The big news, the touching news this week was not the deaths of Ed McMahon, Michael Jackson, or of the one I cared about most, Farrah Fawcett. The big news in the world was the death of the young Iranian woman named Neda Agha-Soltan. She was the beautiful and innocent twenty-six year old music student who was shot in the streets of Teheran, Iran by Basij militia. This woman died from her sudden loss of blood. The intense struggles in Iran today are the struggles for democracy— for truly having a voice in government, and for women to be respected enough to be allowed to go to school and to be free to wear or not wear the Hijab.

If you want to know how things are progressing in our society, pay attention to what is happening to the women. Are women still being battered by ignorant men who know only how to handle things by muscle and violence? Are women and the qualities of sensitivity and gentleness allowed at management desks, board tables, pulpits, and legislative rostrums?

The woman in Mark's Gospel, in an act of desperation, reached out to touch Jesus. She thought, if only she could touch his clothes, she would be healed. She worked her way up in the crowd. Oh, there he was. So close. With all of the strength she had left in her, she lunged toward his robe. Mark says, "Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease."²

¹ National Public Radio *Weekend Edition* Saturday, 6/27/09

²Mark 5:29

Mark should be called “the Immediate Gospel.” The word “immediately” appears twenty-seven times in it. “Immediately her hemorrhage stopped,” and “Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’”³

The woman recoiled in fear. She “came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.”⁴ She knew she shouldn’t have done it. She knew she was unclean. She presented herself to Jesus as though she had committed a crime.

How did Jesus respond? “He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’”⁵ She hadn’t been called “daughter” in a long, long time. She felt loved and cared for.

This is a story of interruption. Jesus and Jairus were on their way to heal Jairus’ daughter, and Jesus was interrupted by this other woman with a need to be healed. Sometimes our response to our interruptions are more important than the tasks we were about! My work at my desk is often interrupted by an e-mail, a phone call, or by a visitor who has stopped in at our office. My work is more time consuming because it is interrupted, but those interruptions represent needs that are often more important than what it was I was working on. Just take a few minutes to sit down and listen. Often, healing takes place.

Meanwhile, Jesus’ interruption was interrupted by some people who came from Jairus’ house, who said it was too late. The girl was dead. Why bother Jesus any further? Is there a significance to the twelve years? Jairus’ daughter was twelve years old when she died. The older woman had been bleeding for twelve years, the entire time the younger girl had lived.

The girl’s death was not the end of the story. Jesus went to Jairus’ house, shooed everyone out, took Jairus and his wife in with him, took the girl by the hand and said “Talitha cum,” which means “Little girl, get up!” and – there it is again, “Immediately, the girl got up and began to walk about.”⁶

Sensitive Jesus knew the girl probably hadn’t eaten for quite a while. He thought of her hunger and “told them to give her something to eat.”⁷

These are two stories of healing. In one, a father asks for healing for his daughter. In the other, the woman has so much faith, she seeks healing for herself. These are not stories about how to get God to do what we want. Instead, they are stories about who God is and how God acts and what God is like. God is a God of healing.

Touch is so important. Jesus took the little girl’s hand. The bleeding woman touched Jesus. Touching can bring healing. We can extend Jesus’ touch to others and bring healing. There is medical touch. A person’s wrist was set on the path toward healing by a physician during surgery. There is emotional touch. Some who are lonely, who feel unloved, just need be touched, and reassured that they have value and worth.

Hugging brings healing. When words fail, hug. Many shut-ins long for human touch. When you visit a shut in, yours may be the only touch that person receives all week. We touch each other each Sunday as we pass the peace. As we touch each other, we pass God’s love to each other. With that touch comes healing.

“Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”⁸ Remember Jesus’ words to Jairus when they heard that it was too late to save his daughter, “Do not fear, only believe.”

³Mark 5:30

⁴Mark 5:33

⁵Mark 5:34

⁶Mark 5:42

⁷Mark 5:43

⁸Mark 5:34