

## Healing Words, Healing Touch

If you get nothing else from today's Gospel lesson, I hope you can be impressed by the construction and presentation of the story. Jesus having been on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee has crossed back to the Jewish side by boat with his disciples. On the journey they encounter a storm. Jesus calms the storm with his words. He asks the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" They are confused and left wondering, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Now they have landed on the other side of the lake. When Jesus gets out of the boat he is immediately surrounded by people. As he walks and talks with them he is suddenly approached by a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. On bended knee he pleads with Jesus to come and heal his daughter. This is an urgent concern and Jesus sets off.

However, as he is walking he notices that something strange has happened. He stops to investigate. He asks the disciples who has touched him. They are incredulous. Given that he is surrounded by people how can they possibly know who touched him. Jesus insists saying there was something different about the touch, that "power had gone forth from him."<sup>1</sup> While all of this is happening we feel anxious for Jairus and his little girl. We wonder why Jesus is stopping for this concern when a small child's life is at stake. The writer has inserted a conflicting demand on Jesus in the midst of the Jairus story to build dramatic tension.

The person who touched Jesus and took power did so without asking. That is what seems to bother Jesus the most. We know that the unnamed woman with the hemorrhage is trying to get healing on the sly. We are sympathetic to her because her story is so sad. She has suffered for twelve years with this hemorrhage. She has spent all her money on physicians but to no avail. When she hears that this miracle worker is in town she thinks this could be her only opportunity for a cure. If she just touches the fringe of his garment she might be healed. She does not think he will notice, but he does. Eventually she falls at his feet and confesses what she has done. Jesus does not chastise her but commends her faith. But what of the little girl?

It is then that messengers rush in to tell Jairus that his daughter has died. They add that there is no need to "Trouble the teacher further." Jesus calmly responds, "Do not fear, only believe." Of course, this is exactly what the woman had just done and now it is Jairus' turn. Jesus proceeds on to Jairus' home. The crowd of mourners at the home laugh at Jesus, when he tells them that she is only asleep. Yet he goes into the home and to the child's bedchamber. He clears the room of all but the girl's parents and Peter, James and John. Looking at the girl he commands her in Aramaic saying, "Little girl get up." She does rise and all is well.

Note how the two stories are intertwined. Both protagonists, Jairus and the woman, fall at Jesus' feet in supplication, one before healing the other after healing. Both recipients of healing are women. One has had a hemorrhage for twelve years the other is twelve years old. One is restored to health by her faith, the other by the faith of her father. One happens in public but is unseen. One happens in private and is

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 5:30 NRSV

witnessed by several. The public healing Jesus acknowledges. The private healing is to remain a secret; an unlikely proposition given many believed the girl was dead. Neither woman is named, which allows them to be an everywoman. The two stories would be compelling on their own but interwoven as they are they becoming dramatic and captivating.

One other aspect of the story that is significant is the role of status. Notice that Jairus and his family are at one end of the scale, while the woman with the hemorrhage is at the other. Jairus is a leader at the synagogue. He comes to Jesus through the crowd that defers to him to make a request of Jesus in broad daylight. The woman sneaks up on Jesus. She works her way through the crowd trying not to be noticed. Her request is silent. Because of her illness she has been marginalized. Her continuous flow of blood makes her ritually unclean. She is a figure in the shadows.

Yet when she touches Jesus, he stops to learn about her and allows the important man to wait. It is not that he does not care about Jairus and his daughter, but he also cares about this woman. Status is not important to Jesus, our humanity is. He shows us by word and example that each of us is a beloved child of God. Each of us receives attention regardless of our worldly status. He does not show special deference to anyone, he shows deference to all. Can we learn to care for each other in this way, I wonder?

Ponder, if you will, how you would feel if someone came into church at this very moment in desperate need and showing the results of desperate circumstances—such as ragged clothing, dirty, and maybe even symptoms of mental health issues. Would we step back in fear and revulsion, or would we step forward in care and love? It is hard to know until it happens. But if we prepare our hearts and minds for reaching out it will become second nature just as it was for Jesus.

The world is full of need. It is often not as obvious as that, but the need still exists. I expect there is someone amongst us this morning or with whom you work or regularly meet who is in a need as desperate as the hemorrhaging woman or the little girl. They may feel that no one cares, or they may not have an advocate as strong and well-placed as Jairus. How do we let them know that they matter? How do we let them know that their pain does not have to be a burden they carry alone? We do so by allowing them to speak. We do so by showing kindness and consideration in the way you touch them or speak with them. It is by noticing there is something different and not letting it go by without remark.

Kindness is so underrated in a society where to get involved seems to be anathema. Sometimes the kindness will be rejected, but that is OK. When the kindness is accepted it can mean the world to someone. It can mean life and death to someone. It will certainly mean the difference between life and just an appearance of life to you and your soul.

It is a well-constructed story. In fact, it is so well constructed that we may not realize the call is to each of us to care for each other. It does not take a miracle-worker to make a difference. It just takes being present and recognizing need. That is what Jesus did and that is what we can do also.