

Sermon: A Little Bit Touched  
Lesson: Mark 5: 21-42  
Date: June 28, 2009  
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Who touched my clothes? Surrounded by a jostling crowd, Jesus asks this question as he feels power leaving him. The disciples are astounded and confused. There are people all around you, pressing on you. What do you meant? Straightforward as this passage seems, we hear it with the same confusion as the disciples and much of the same trepidation as the woman who had reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' garment. It almost seems a shame that emoticons were not around when the Bible was being codified. You know, those funny little symbols that tell you the emotion with which something it typed. We cannot tell exactly how Jesus uttered these words. Some have suggested that Jesus spoke them somewhat angrily, with a hint of accusation, which then softened when faced with the fearful woman. It need not have been so. In fact, I believe this passage and the fullness of the Gospel lead us to believe something quite different.

Jesus felt the healing power of God flow from him. He also knew that the person who received that power needed more than physical healing. Whether he divined that the person touching him was someone who, by the very nature of her illness was an outcast, or just knew that someone who sought secret healing also needed to be noticed, we cannot know. What we do know is that Jesus was not content to let this healing pass without a further word of hope.

Who touched my clothes? Jesus' words open the door for the woman to come forward and confess – and to receive, not just forgiveness as Jesus had offered so many others, but affirmation. Your faith has made you well, go in peace, and be healed of your disease.

Unfortunately, the very words which free the woman from any possible guilt of having stolen her health, are the words which make us most uncomfortable. We have seen all too often the tragic effects of one who takes these words out of context, who

focuses on them without consideration for all the rest of the teachings of the Scriptures concerning health and faith. Only in the last few months we have witnessed the trial of a mother who, relying on faith healing, watched as her daughter died because she was not given the insulin which would have saved her life. We are rightly saddened, and upset, when we learn of the Scriptures being misused by misinterpretations of such passages as this.

We ought, however, to be equally upset by those who would suggest that we should ignore such passages, relegating them to more credulous times. The passage is clear in saying that the woman received healing, as did Jairus' daughter. Jesus does not say, "You have been healed by the power of suggestion," but does say, "Your faith has made you well." Holding to that truth, we do pray for healing, but often subconsciously wonder if God still works that way. Our guilt over such thinking is compounded when we read the passage which directly follows our passage for today. That next passage suggests that Jesus could do no deed of power in his hometown because the people did not believe. It begins to appear that those who would directly, and automatically, link faith and healing might be correct.

Faith and healing are linked, but not in the way that is sometimes claimed. When we look at the Scriptures as a whole, as good Presbyterians always do, we find that the connections between faith and healing are complex. Some people of great faith are healed, even physically, such in today's passages. Some people with no faith are still healed miraculously – such as Naaman the leper. However, some people with great faith are not granted healing through prayer, such as the apostle Paul who prayed three times for an unknown problem to be resolved. He, instead, was told that God's grace was sufficient for his need. Job, another man of great faith, was allowed to suffer for quite some time. Christ, himself, did not have the cup of suffering removed from his lips, even though he prayed that it might be.

We have treated the relationship between faith and healing like a logic problem. We read, and sometimes have seen, miraculous healings as the result of prayer. We read, and sometimes have felt, the lack of healing due to a lack of faith.

We have changed the equation from *faith can heal*, into *faith equals healing* and its corollary *no healing equals no faith* . It is the same as saying that because four plus four equals eight, then eight must always and only equal four plus four. However, we know this is wrong. Eight can also be two plus six, three plus five, one plus seven, etc. The same may be said for healing. Healing may come from faith; it may also come from physicians, medicines, or simply rest. Healing may restore the body; it may also include restoring the spirit, bringing us peace for our face to face encounter with God.

The word most often used for healing, or being made well, in this passage from Mark, is *sothe*, a Greek word which can be translated as healed, made whole, or saved. Both other Greek words for this concept in this passage also can be translated “made whole”. The healing which comes from Christ is sometimes a healing of the physical body, but is always a healing which restores the wholeness of our relationship with God.

Diogenes Allen, in his book Christian Belief in a Postmodern World, says it this way:

“Jesus cares about people’s physical health, but this is only one aspect of the kingdom of God. People can become so concerned with physical health that they use their religion to seek health and other material blessings without a significant interest in the kingdom of God. God’s intention is that we seek God with all our hearts. If God were to give us earthly well-being whenever we asked for it, we would remain focused on limited goods and not the good of communion with God.”

(Westminster/John Knox, 1986, p. 178)

To the woman whose body has been healed in a stolen manner, Jesus offers the freedom of receiving the healing openly, with the love of God. To the leader of the synagogue, Jesus offers acceptance and new hope, without using the opportunity to chastise one whose colleagues, if not he himself, were so resistance to Jesus’ message.

In this passage, we learn less about the relationship between faith and healing, though that is a factor, than we learn about the ministry which Jesus led, and the

ministry to which we are called.

Who touched my clothes? As the Body of Christ, when we gather for worship, or when we are in the world living our daily lives, we are called to be clothed with Christ. Are we sensitive to those around us who are hesitantly reaching out to touch the hem of Christ's garment, seeking healing and hope? Do we stop in our busy schedules, to learn the deeper need of those around us – or are we satisfied with providing a bit of food, a quick smile, a surface friendship? Jesus could have rushed on to Jairus' house; certainly the need was urgent. Instead he stopped, stopping not only his own progress but that of the whole crowd. He asked a ridiculous question, "Who touched my clothes?" In doing so, he allowed the woman who had been an outcast, who had been so ill, to become a witness. She comes forward in fear and trembling, for as much as she had believed in Jesus' power, she did not yet seem to know God's love and grace. She leaves both healed and affirmed in her relationship with God.

We assume that people who wander into this sanctuary- whether members or visitors, or whom we meet in the workplace, in our neighborhoods, wherever we are, know the living Christ, whose Body we are called to be. We forget that being the Body of Christ involves more than service to one another in the way of teaching classes, bringing dinners, providing rides, though all these things are important. I don't want to get in trouble here. I wouldn't want to people responsible for recruiting people for these ministries to get upset with me. They are important. But being the Body of Christ is even more.

Being the Body of Christ means being in relationship – first with God, and then with one another, and with the world. It means becoming vulnerable. The transforming Holy Spirit radically changes who we are and how we see ourselves and others. Those others may be people of great power, such as Jairus, or nameless people, such as the ailing woman. They may be people whose faith is assumed, like Jairus, or whose faith is revealed like the woman. We will not know unless we take the time to meet, to visit, to serve... and to be served – for like the shy and fearful

woman, those whom we least notice, may have the most to teach us.

Each day Jesus asks us, “Who touched my clothes?” We will not know unless we stop, like Jesus, and look around. We will not grow unless we notice who has been sent our way for relationship, who has been drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit to remind us of our purpose and witness, of our own need to be transformed. We will not know or grow unless we look around and pay attention, not just making casual acquaintance with the people around us but loving them as our brothers and sisters. Only when we do stop, do ask, are we truly the Body of Christ, the disciples of our Lord who calls us to be children of God.

Friends, brothers and sisters, let us reach out together to touch the hem of Christ. Let us allow God to touch us with the healing hand of Christ which brings us into wholeness with God and with one another. Let us be touched, richly and deeply – not just a little bit – by those around us. Then, and then only, will we truly proclaim our faith.