

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – June 27, 2021 – The Power of Touch Psalm 130:1-8 and Mark 5:21-43

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus and his disciples are in high demand. They have just made landfall when they are greeted by a large crowd of spectators, well-wishers, skeptics, and believers. The crowd is loud and animated. And while most remain nameless, our attention soon shifts to Jairus, a man described as a “ruler of the synagogue.” Wealthy and influential, Jairus “would have been accustomed to having others beg him for favors.”¹ Yet, the roles are now reversed, and he is one who has been made vulnerable.

His twelve-year-old daughter is very ill, and she is quickly fading into lifelessness. So Jairus suspends his pride and throws himself at the feet of Jesus. “My daughter is dying,” he shouts. “Please come quickly and save her.” Curiously, Jesus asks no clarifying questions. He doesn’t ask, “where is your daughter located now?” He doesn’t ask, “who is with her?” He doesn’t ask, “what happened” or “what is wrong?” Instead, Jesus chooses simply to walk with this man and, in so doing, he joins him in his “distress and pain.”²

¹ Pheme Perkins, *Mark, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander Keck (Abingdon Press, 1995), 588.

² Donald Capps, *Jesus: The Village Psychiatrist* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 122.

Friends, as Christians following in the footsteps of Jesus, we hear the call to draw alongside others in those places where they are hurting and broken. We recognize the universality of human pain, and we endeavor to stand with them in the midst of their struggles. This is what it means to live out our discipleship.

Here, Jesus goes forth as our exemplar. He does not enjoy the benefit of a private conversation. Instead, the crowd remains, and they press in on him relentlessly. In this, I am reminded of the hectic nature of our daily schedules, and how the needs of others can easily seem like one more distraction or interruption competing for our limited time.

Surely, Jesus knew that this crowd would be needy. Those who gathered to greet him were typically poor, and marginalized, and desperate for change.³ And from this crowd soon emerges a nameless woman who embodies this reality. We learn that she is tormented by a chronic hemorrhage which, “according to the Levitical purity code,” should result in her perpetual segregation. Tragically, “the woman has lost all her money in failed attempts to treat her condition,” and she has grown only worse.⁴

³ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, (Orbis Books, 1991), 200.

⁴ Matthew L. Skinner, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 3*, ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 123.

Still, she takes the initiative in her quest for liberation.⁵ PHEME PERKINS describes her struggle through the crowd as a demonstration of “her ability to overcome obstacles that would separate her from Jesus.”⁶ Quietly, and in an effort to end her ordeal once and for all, she reaches out to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. The text says that Jesus was “immediately aware that power had gone forth from him.” And, in response, he turned to the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’”

What follows is a moment of incredible “integrity and courage.” Rather than disappearing into the crowd, “the woman comes to him in fear and trembling, falls down before him, and tells him the whole truth.”⁷ Jesus does not condemn her. Instead, he says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” And with that, this formerly ostracized woman is elevated as a symbol of faithfulness. Healed of her afflictions and welcomed as Jesus’ “daughter,” she is publicly affirmed as a member of the household of God.

Throughout the New Testament, “radical trust in Jesus” is a “determination born from one’s sense of deep need. It is in the conviction that Jesus can and will

⁵ Myers, 202-203.

⁶ Perkins, 587.

⁷ Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press, 2009), 109.

help.”⁸ Jairus, too, lives with this conviction. Therefore, Jesus will not remain in this moment, basking in the admiration of the crowd. Rather, his journey with Jairus continues, for Jesus stands in solidarity with this family, as well. The point for us is clear: whether Jew or gentile, the heirs of this promise will be welcomed into the fold without delay.

While on the way, word arrives that Jairus’ daughter has died. And the suggestion soon emerges that the synagogue leader need not trouble Jesus any further. Jesus, though, is undeterred, saying, “Do not fear, only believe.” It is striking that the call to believe, in this instance, requires nothing less than faith in the resurrection.

When Jesus reaches the home of Jairus, he enters a scene that is cloaked in sadness. A child has died, resulting in an understandable wave of grief that rushes over this community. With hope in short supply, Jesus’ suggests that she is merely sleeping, and is quickly met with laughter and derision. In response, he leans into the pain of this moment, and draws near to the little girl. As a result, “Jesus confronts

⁸ Skinner, 123.

disease and death, that is, the deep forces that marginalize and hold people in despair.”⁹

In this passage, we find two women who serve as representatives of all people crying out like the psalmist by “naming the limits that impinge upon life.”¹⁰ This is the intersection of doubt, despair, and hope, which reside in every faithful person. Both the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus “came to Jesus with the faith appropriate to disciples.”¹¹ Jesus affirms them, by identifying “the woman’s confident desperation as ‘faith,’” and by urging “Jairus to ‘continue to have faith.’”¹² In the midst of the pain, Jesus draws near, ultimately restoring the “wholeness and dignity” of these women.¹³

Donald Capps observes that, for many practitioners of healing, “voice and touch can accomplish together what one or the other may not be able to accomplish alone.”¹⁴ Here, Jesus takes the girl’s hand and says, “Little girl, rise up.” Immediately, she is restored to life, just as the woman had been immediately cured

⁹ Richard W. Voelz, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 3*, ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 125.

¹⁰ Voelz, 126.

¹¹ Perkins, 590.

¹² Skinner, 123.

¹³ Skinner, 122.

¹⁴ Capps, 123-124.

when she touched Jesus' garment.”¹⁵ Fittingly, the verb for “rise up” found here is the same one used to acknowledge Jesus' own resurrection.¹⁶

Today, the title of my sermon is “The Power of Touch.” The point here is about Jesus bringing restoration to the lives of others. Resurrecting them from their status as outcasts and marginalized members of society and community into the family and kinship of the household of God.

He accomplished all of this with the power of his voice and with the power of personal touch, which breaks down the barriers that divide us and brings wholeness to the broken. In these accounts, we find signs of his healing mercy, and foreshadowing of resurrection we have through him. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.

¹⁵ Perkins, 589.

¹⁶ Perkins, 591.