

THE TOUCH OF LIFE

Mark 5:21-43

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

July 1, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 5, verses 21 through 43. It is on page 710 of the pew Bible. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 5, beginning at verse 21, we read in Jesus' name.

²¹ And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." ²⁴ And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "**Who touched my garments?**" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, '**Who touched me?**'" ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ And he said to her, "**Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.**"

³⁵ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "**Do not fear, only believe.**" ³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "**Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.**" ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "**Talitha cumi,**" which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a couple lies that people in this passage believe. But Jesus refutes these lies by his actions. The first lie is this: *God is too busy with more important things for him to care about the things in my life.* That's the first lie, and Jesus proves it false. The second lie is this: *Once a person dies, then it's all over; there's nothing anyone can do about it.* That's the second lie, and Jesus also proves it false. Jesus proves himself to be gracious to all classes of people, and he proves that he has power, even over death.

It starts with Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee, surrounded by a large crowd. And a ruler of the synagogue by the name of Jairus comes to see Jesus. He's desperate. His twelve-year-old daughter is at the point of death. Jesus must come quickly. She could die at any moment. So Jesus goes along with Jairus, and the crowd follows him. They want to see what Jesus can do. Can he really heal this girl?

But there was another woman who was ill. She had been ill for twelve years—exactly as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive. The older lady spent all she had on doctors, but everything the doctors tried only made her worse. But then she hears the reports about Jesus, and she believed he could make her well. And all she wanted to do was touch his garment. If Jesus really is as powerful as they say, that should be enough. She must have had to fight her way through the crowd, but eventually she makes her way to Jesus and touches his garment.

Now she apparently didn't think herself to be as important as the little girl. She didn't have a synagogue ruler daddy to go and plead with Jesus. Compare her approach to Jesus with Jairus' approach. Jairus came right up to Jesus and spoke with him. And Jairus asked Jesus to come with him. He asked Jesus to devote this chunk of time to his daughter. But this woman doesn't even try to speak to Jesus. She doesn't intend to waste one second of his time. After all, Jesus was busy attending to the daughter of an important person. So she plans no greeting, no request, and no burden on Jesus' time or attention. Her plan was to not even be noticed. There's a great crowd there, and people are bumping into one another all the time. But she's not even going to touch Jesus himself—only his garment. The whole thing should go completely unnoticed.

She pulled it off, and it worked ... instantly. The flow of blood stopped, and she immediately felt in her body that her disease was completely healed. But Jesus felt it too. And it seems like the woman wasn't expecting that.

Jesus stopped, turned around, and asked what seemed like a silly question: **"Who touched me?"** (5:31) Now there was a great crowd pressing in on Jesus. The truth is, a lot of people probably touched him. But Jesus is talking about the woman who merely touched his garment. Jesus noticed her. Her plan was going off the rails. Apparently she had done something wrong, and Jesus was stopping to rebuke her. Perhaps it was because her disease made her unclean (Lev. 15:25). But she didn't try to hide. She confessed. "In fear and trembling [she] fell down before him and told him the whole truth" (5:33). But Jesus does not scold her; he blesses her. **"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease"** (5:34).

Now this is interesting that Jesus takes the time to stop and do this. It doesn't seem like it took that long, but Jesus is on the way to heal a very sick girl who was at the point of death. She could die at any moment. And, in fact, while Jesus was speaking to this woman, word came that the girl did die. But Jesus takes the time to stop and praise this woman for her faith. He could

have just kept going. She was already healed. She got what she wanted. It's already a happy ending for her. But Jesus stopped to acknowledge her. She didn't want to waste Jesus' important time, but Jesus wanted to give it to her. She was ashamed of what she did, but Jesus wanted her to know that what she did was okay. It was not sinful; it was good.

So Jesus corrects the lie that God is too busy with more important things for him to care about the things in our lives. God is not too busy. And God is not so far removed from us that he doesn't care about the things of our lives. God invites us to bring our cares to him. And, in fact, this is the way God desires to be worshipped.

We tend to think of worship as declaring God's praises—telling him how great he is. And that's part of it, but the highest act of worship is to boldly ask God for good things. The highest act of worship is to confess our sins, asking God to be merciful to us, and asking him to give us every good thing, up to and including his own Kingdom. This is the highest act of worship because it confesses that God is both capable and gracious enough to give us great things, and it grants him the opportunity to demonstrate his goodness and mercy. We worship God by seeking mercy and grace from him.

Another thing we see here is the nature and power of faith. Jesus says to the woman, **“Your faith has made you well.”** Now we can fall into error if we make too much out of faith, so that we actually diminish Christ. And we can fall into error on the other side if we make too little of faith, so that we no longer insist on its necessity. We understand faith rightly when we affirm that it is necessary, and that it is powerful, but that the power is not in our believing, but solely in Christ.

Consider the sick woman. She was healed because she believed Jesus had the power to heal her, and she went to him for healing. Had she trusted in anything else, like a squirrel, or some false god, or even the power of her own faith, she would not have been healed, because none of those things have the power to heal her. So it was not the power of her faith, but the power of Jesus that healed her.

But we also don't want to make too little of faith by not insisting on its necessity. It was necessary for her to trust in Jesus. If she had just been walking through the crowd and accidentally bumped into Jesus, it doesn't seem like anything would have happened. Lots of people bumped into Jesus that day. It's reasonable to expect that at least a few of them probably had some sort of physical malady. But there's nothing about allergies going away or sprained ankles being instantly healed. This woman was healed because she had faith, and her faith was placed in the right person. Jesus notices this, and he commends her for it. He blesses her and sends her away in peace.

But then the bad news comes. While Jesus is speaking to the formerly ill woman, word comes from Jairus' house that his daughter was dead. It must have put quite a damper on the joy of this woman being healed. A twelve-year-old girl was dead. This is a tragedy. And then comes the second lie: **“Why trouble the Teacher any further?”** (5:35) The lie is that once a person dies, then it's all over; there's nothing anyone can do about it. But Jesus, of course, knows better, because he knows who he is, and he knows what he can do. So he says to Jairus, **“Do not fear, only believe”** (5:36).

Notice that Jesus takes control of the situation. Now we don't know what Jairus would have said to Jesus. We don't know if he would have asked Jesus to come and raise his daughter from the dead. I suspect not. If Jairus is like everyone else, he probably assumed that was the end. His daughter was dead, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Death seems very permanent. So no one in the Bible ever asks Jesus to raise a dead person. Plenty of people ask Jesus to heal the sick. They bring sick people to Jesus, they bring Jesus to sick people, and they expect Jesus to be able to do something about sickness. But no one ever asks Jesus to raise a dead person. Whenever Jesus does raise someone from the dead—and he does it a few times—he does it on his own initiative. It's his own idea and nobody else's, because no one ever expects him to do it.

So Jesus presses on to Jairus' house. And it's a much smaller group that goes with Jesus. It's just Jesus, Jairus, Peter, James, and John. No more crowd.

But there was a crowd at the house. They were weeping and wailing. And Jesus asks what seems like another silly question: **“Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.”** (5:39) Then they laugh at Jesus. They know the girl is dead, and Jesus knows this too. But Jesus says the girl is not dead, even though she is, because to Jesus, no one is really dead. To Jesus, the most a person ever does is sleep. So he says that she is just sleeping because he intends to go and wake her up. The people laugh at Jesus, either because they don't understand what he's saying—they think he's in denial about the situation, insisting that she's not really dead, even before he sees her—or because they do understand what he's saying, but don't believe he has the power to wake her from death. So they laugh at him. Either way, they think Jesus is naïve concerning this whole death thing. But Jesus just puts them out of the house.

He takes the father and mother and his three disciples and goes to the little girl. And this is where the text seems to go in slow motion. He picks up her hand. And he speaks to her. And Mark records Jesus' words exactly how they were spoken. Usually the gospel writers translate Jesus' words directly into Greek, the language the New Testament was written in. But Jesus would have spoken more often in Aramaic, the common language of the people. And there are a few places where Jesus' words are preserved in the original Aramaic. One of those places you might remember is at the cross, where Jesus cries out, **“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”** which means, **‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’** (15:34) It seems to be a point of emphasis. These words are so important that they are preserved exactly how Jesus spoke them. So in Aramaic Jesus says to the girl, **“Talitha cumi,”** which means, **‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’** (5:41).

“And immediately the girl got up and began walking” (5:42). This, of course, is amazing. And notice this: right before the girl died, she would have been bedridden. She wouldn't have been walking around. So Jesus does more than just raise her from the dead. He also heals whatever had been ailing her. He does the thing he decided to do—raise her from the dead—and he also does the thing the girl's father asked him to do at the beginning of the text—he heals the girl.

So what do we make of these two miracles? We ask Jesus to heal people all the time. Pretty much every time someone gets sick we pray for them. Sometimes they get better. And whether that comes about through natural or supernatural means we attribute it to God, because he is the master of both realms. And sometimes people don't get better. They die. And I suppose we

usually stop praying at that point. We don't ask God to raise them from the dead, though he is certainly capable of doing that too. But why don't people always get better? That seems to be the way it worked in the gospels. There was never any question with Jesus. He always healed people. He even raised them from the dead when no one expected it. Why don't we get the same treatment?

The answer, I suppose, has to do with what the purpose of those miracles was. Why did Jesus heal people? And why did he raise them from the dead? The obvious answer is because he had compassion on them. They had a need, he had the solution, he's also a really nice guy, so he fixed the problem. That's the obvious answer. But that's only part of it, and it's not even the primary reason Jesus healed them. It also wasn't the purpose of Jesus' ministry. If Jesus' purpose was to heal sick people and bring dead people back to life, he would have just kept on doing that. He wouldn't have gone to the cross. He wouldn't have died ... ever. He would have used his power to keep himself alive, and he would have just kept healing and raising people right up to the present day.

But the various diseases and even death itself are not really the problem. They are merely symptoms of the problem, and Jesus came to treat the disease, not the symptoms. The disease, of course, is sin. And I don't simply mean the random acts of evil we commit. I mean the entire fallen condition we are all infected with. This is why we get sick, and this is why we die. And this is why Jesus went to the cross. The Great Physician cures his patients, not by treating their diseases, but by assuming the disease of sin into himself and eradicating it in his death.

So if the cross is the healing act of the Great Physician, then what's the purpose of healing the sick woman and raising the dead girl? Now there was certainly value in the life he restored them to, but they both got sick and died again. Everyone did. The greater value is in what it teaches. This is ultimately why Jesus performed those miracles. It teaches us, first, that Jesus is God in human flesh; therefore, he has all the power in the universe. And, second, it gives a foreshadowing, finally and ultimately, of what Jesus is going to do on the Last Day when he comes to raise all the dead and bring perfect healing to all his believing saints. These miracles teach us who Jesus is and what he is going to do on the Last Day, so that we might call upon him now in faith and receive what he has secured for us by his death and resurrection. The miracles exist to assure everyone who trusts in Jesus that we will be healed and we will be raised to life.

The truth that Jesus teaches is that he has concern for all people, regardless of how insignificant we might be in the world's eyes. Everyone who calls upon him will be saved (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13). And death, which seems so permanent to us, is merely sleep to Jesus, and he will wake us out of it. Just as he spoke to the little girl, so he will speak to all who call upon him, "Little girl, [little boy, my child,] I say to you, arise." Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)