

Sermon – June 27, 2021
“He touched me”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Mark 5:21-43

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good morning. I hope you are enjoying our start to summer and are ready for all of the summer activities that are coming. I want to thank everyone who brought canned food or any food items last week for the collection we did for our local food bank. I was enabled by your generosity to deliver 137 pounds of food to the food bank on Thursday. I also want to thank those who were able to go with us to Lewisetta on Friday to spend time helping to clean up from the tornado. We made great progress on Friday, in part due to our Baptist friends who sent a skid steer adding a lot of capability to our team. It is a blessing to be able to be the hands and feet of Jesus to people whose needs seem overwhelming. Thank you for your support to these efforts.

To place this morning's scripture passage in some context, let me remind us that Mark has been leading us through a series of events in Jesus' ministry that reveal who Jesus is. We have witnessed Jesus teach, command the wind and the sea, and heal a man with a legion of demons. Mark continues to reveal to us more and more about Jesus as he answers the question, "Who is this man?" Let's look at this morning's text to see what astonishing revelations it holds for us today.

There are two narratives in today's scripture, one inserted into the other. The first narrates the situation of the ruler of the synagogue and the inserted one is a narrative of a woman. To have a synagogue, a town would need ten Jewish men, and those ten would select one of their group to be their ruler. This is the one who oversees the synagogue, a place where others come and learn about God, learn what it means to be in God's presence, and take time to remember what God has done and is doing through Israel. When Jesus comes ashore, he is met by the crowd, and out of the crowd steps the ruler of the synagogue. He immediately falls at Jesus' feet and makes a plea for Jesus to come and lay his hands on his dying daughter. This man at Jesus' feet is named in the Gospel of Mark, Jairus. Naming of people is rare in Mark's Gospel and it marks this man as significant. Jairus would be wealthy, affluent in the community, well known by others, and a source of wisdom for his town. Now all parents with us this morning who have ever had a very ill child will recognize Jairus' plea to Jesus. They will hear the love for a child in his plea. This child is a beloved daughter who is ill and is near death. Notice that Jairus comes to Jesus in public. He is not afraid to humbly fall at Jesus' feet and ask for Jesus to come and lay hands on his daughter that she might live. We see Jairus' faith in his plea, a plea humbly given at Jesus' feet. He believes that Jesus can heal his daughter. Jairus is also one who is versed in the law. He knows that God is the One who created humankind by His word and hand. Jairus is one who has faith that Jesus is one through whom God works, and he comes to plead to Jesus to go with him and heal, or recreate, his daughter before she dies. There is great urgency in this request, and that urgency points to faith that may be shallow as it does not think healing can come after death. His humble plea is for Jesus to come now and lay hands on his daughter that she might not die and be restored to life. Jesus immediately sets out through the crowded streets where people are bumping into him and touching him as he hurries along. Jesus is going with Jairus to heal his daughter. Notice that those around Jesus who touch him as he moves through the crowd are not changed by their encounter.

In the crowd Jesus is walking through, there is a woman. She is not named in the gospels. That she is not named makes the point that she is one without status in this community. She is one who is suffering. She is ill, having suffered for twelve years with a hemorrhage. This loss of blood means she is one who makes others unclean. According to the law, anyone who has contact with her by lying in her bed, sitting in her chair, or touching her will become unclean and will have to bathe and then wash their clothes to become clean again. These laws about bodily

impurities are laws about the loss of life forces. Here, that life force is blood. To lose blood is to bring death. She is one who is dying and is already in essence dead to her community. She most likely is either not married or one who has been divorced, as her presence in a home would make others unclean. What money she once may have had she has spent on physicians whose efforts have made her condition worse and her poor. She may have heard from others that Jesus heals and that some are healed by touching his cloak. She is one on the margins of society, one who cannot approach Jesus directly. She is one whom others talk about and avoid. She must come to Jesus in secret. She comes with hope and faith in her heart that if she but touches Jesus' cloak, she will be healed. She sees a disturbance in the crowd, and then there is Jesus hurrying through the crowd with others. She has not been seen; this is her moment. She works her way behind Jesus and then dares to send her hand and touch his cloak. When she does, she feels within her body healing take place. She is well! She has done more than reach out to touch. Her actions have brought faith and Jesus together, and healing has come. Now she just needs to slip away and no one else will know what has happened.

Jesus stops, turns about in the crowd, and says, "Who touched my clothes?" When Jesus stops, all of those around him stop to listen, to see what might be so important as to interrupt this hurried walk to heal a dying child. His disciples tell him that many people are touching him as they hurry along, that many of those they passed by have touched Jesus. Their response is their way of asking, "Why does he stop? Has he forgotten the urgency of the mission that is driving them through the crowd?" Jesus turns and looks around at the crowd, searching for someone. Healing has gone out from him. The power to heal has passed through him. Jesus, as one sent from the Father and filled with the Spirit, has felt God's free and gracious hand act through him, and now he searches for the one who is healed. God's will has been to heal. God has honored the faith of the woman no matter how shallow or misplaced it might be. Her heart's cry has been heard by God. Her faith, no matter how frail, is honored and God heals her through Jesus, and Jesus is aware of God's action. It is not the touch of the cloak that brought healing, but God responding to the faith of one of His children. Jesus understands that God has acted through him and that he needs to complete the healing of the one God has reached out to through him, and so he searches for the one. Fear and trembling fill the woman in the crowd. She knows she is healed, but now something unexpected is happening, Jesus is looking for the one who touched him and she knows she is that one. Her growing fear could be from several sources. She may

have guilt from breaking the purity laws that hold that anyone who touches her becomes unclean, Jesus included. Jesus, though, is not one who becomes unclean, but is the one who restores and reverses uncleanness. The woman may also fear that her action of touching Jesus' cloak will be seen as stealing his power and that her action may have transmitted her hemorrhaging sickness to him. She may be afraid that she will be scolded or punished in some public manner for what she has done. Why does Jesus search for her? Why does he stop from his urgent task to find her? Notice that Mark connects her realization that she is healed to her fear. Her fear may also come from the realization that Jesus is one who is filled with power. Like the disciples on the sea in the midst of the great storm when it was stilled, she also is filled with awe that Jesus has healed her. She is now asking, "Who is this man?" "Who is this who searches for me?" "Who is this who has power to heal?" Like Jairus who came to Jesus and fell at his feet, she now comes forward and falls there as well. She confesses her action and tells the whole truth. But don't forget that now she comes before Jesus as a healed person, no longer the unclean, unseen one. Many in the crowd will recognize her as the unclean one. When she finishes speaking, Jesus tells her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace, and be healed of your disease." Did we notice that Jesus called her daughter? Jesus welcomes her into his family. She is not the woman with the hemorrhage anymore; she has been welcomed into community. Her illness is healed, and now Jesus has restored her to life and sends her out in peace. Jesus has stopped to find her because she is a person who is worth taking time for, a person worth finding, recognizing, healing, restoring, and sending out in peace. This is not the peace of feeling good about one's self for some reason. This is the peace of the Hebrew word "Shalom." Shalom includes the ideas of wholeness, well-being, prosperity, security, friendship, and salvation. This is the peace that Jesus gives to this once unclean woman, to a daughter of Israel. God has healed through Jesus, and Jesus makes that healing complete by finding her and restoring her to life.

At this moment, Jairus' friends arrive and share the news that Jairus' daughter is dead and tell him not to bother the teacher anymore. Jesus' delay to find the woman and heal her has come at the cost of Jairus' daughter's life. Don't miss the way these men speak of Jesus. They call him teacher. Those who are friends of Jairus have no faith that this teacher who draws crowds can bring someone back from the dead. They lack that kind of faith in Jesus. In their minds, Jesus is no longer needed. At this moment, Mark records the only words Jesus speaks directly to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." These words require a new level of faith. Jesus tells Jairus to move

beyond a faith in healing. He has to move beyond a faith in the touch of Jesus' hands to restore health. He has to move to faith that Jesus can restore his daughter's life. He has to believe in the very face of death. This is a different level of faith.

Jesus continues on the walk through the crowds to Jairus' house. Those who work as mourners are already at work when Jesus arrives, and given Jairus' status, there may be many mourners present. Jairus' family has gathered, and those present ridicule Jesus when he tells them the child is not dead but sleeping. They know the signs of death and are confident they have witnessed them. Jesus clears the house and takes with him witnesses to what he will do. Jesus goes, takes the little girl's hand, tells her to get up, and she does. Jesus touches her hand and she comes to life as if he had awakened her from sleep. Jesus gives Jairus and his wife back their daughter and tells them to feed her, to care for her, to welcome her back into her family. Death has occurred, Jesus has touched a dead body, another source of uncleanness, and Jesus is not made unclean, but has brought life to one who was dead. Jesus brings life, and this restoration of a little girl's life points forward to a time when Jesus will restore life not with a temporary reprieve from death, but with the resurrection of the body into eternal life for all of those who have faith, who believe in Jesus. Jesus' ability to bring back this child to life points to a time when the grip of death will finally be broken, through Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection.

There are several points for us today in these parallel stories of healing. The first is that faith comes with action. Faith does not come from knowing about Jesus; it comes from acting on that knowledge. Jairus knows about Jesus, but goes to him, pleads for Jesus to come, and walks with him even after his daughter's death. Jairus is one who acts on his faith. The woman in the crowd acts on faith as she reaches out to touch Jesus with the faith that Jesus heals. Mark is continuing to show us who Jesus is through these narratives. Jesus not only teaches, stills the storms, and drives out demons, but he also heals our wounds and restores us to life, even eternal life.

The contrast of Jairus and the woman in the crowd is a contrast between two people Jesus responds to. They are very different. One is rich, respected and ritually pure. The other is poor, unclean and shunned, but Jesus responds to the faith they both possess. It is not who we are or what we do that Jesus responds to. It is the faith, or our heart condition. In God's kingdom, nobodies become somebodies and somebodies are the same as nobodies. It is one's faith that

God and Jesus respond to, not our status in life. No one is beyond the reach of Jesus Christ, no sin is too great for forgiveness, no brokenness is too great to heal. In Jesus we have an awesome savior.

Another parallel between these two people's situations is that being unclean does not make Jesus unclean when he touches us. Don't miss this idea. Jesus is not made unclean by being touched by the woman with the hemorrhage and Jesus is not made unclean by touching a dead body. Instead, his touch brings healing and restored life.

The final parallel is that Jesus triumphs over death. The woman is dead to her community and Jairus' daughter is dead, yet Jesus brings life to both. Mark has been asking the key question throughout these chapters, "Who is this man?" Each narrative has addressed a different aspect, providing a new revelation of who Jesus Christ is. Mark's Gospel reveals that he is a teacher, stiller of storms, banisher of demons, and now a healer of the unclean and one who raises the dead. These answers to this key question all point forward to those who have faith in Jesus being restored to a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And so, we come again to this question that we find in these narratives, "Who is this man?" It is by faith that we answer this question, a question each person will answer. Our challenge is to have faith in who Jesus is and to act on our faith. Augustine made the statement in one of his sermons that, "Few are they who by faith touch him; multitudes are they who throng about him."ⁱ As Jesus passes through the crowd around us, will we have faith in what he can do in our lives, approach him, and then reach out in our faith to touch him?

Pray with me: Lord, we are not worthy to reach out and touch you. Yet we know that such a touch brings healing, forgiveness, restored relationships, and life eternal. Jesus, give us the courage to act on our faith. Let us not be someone who is part of a multitude you pass through, but those who reach out in faith as you pass by, acting to bring our faith to you that we might receive life eternal. Amen

ⁱ WHETHER PROXIMITY ELICITS FAITH. AUGUSTINE: Few are they who by faith touch him; multitudes are they who throng about him.⁸ SERMON 62.4.9