

MARK 5:21-43

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, "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." ²⁴So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. Then 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. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Holy Hugging July 1, 2018

Whenever I hear this story in Mark's Gospel, I want to start singing that jingle from the old phone commercial that went, "Reach out, reach out and touch someone." Anyone remember that one? And it reminds me that touching is an important part of our story today, as well as important to our daily lives. At my house, we have a ritual. It may be one that you share at your house as well. Before either of us leave the house for the day we give each other a hug and a kiss. And we always say, "I love you!" Very important to hear that every day.

Touch is a powerful thing in our lives and I know if I don't get that morning hug I find myself at the end of the day feeling a little disconnected and not quite myself. That's of course when I will just stop everything while fixing dinner, or pattering around the house, and just ask for a hug. Maybe you've done the same thing in your life. And it may be that you don't have someone to readily give or receive a hug from. I'm sorry about that, because I think appropriate human touch is important, and it was important for Jesus as well, as he healed and lifted people up from despair. It brings great joy and comfort in surprising and mysterious ways which many studies have affirmed.

I've shared this story before, but it always moves me in light of this text today. It was a YouTube video of what I guess we could call, a social experiment. There was a young Portuguese man named Gabriel who made a sign that said, "I trust you. Do you trust me? Give me a Hug." This has become a world-wide movement.

After placing the sign in front of him, he stood blindfolded in the middle of a busy pedestrian area in Lisbon with his arms extended. It was interesting to watch as people began to notice. Everyone was hesitant of course. Hug a complete stranger? What would other people think? You could read the questions on their faces as they strode by. Some didn't even look. But eventually, a child decided that he would take the risk and gave Gabriel a hug. After that, the hugs began in earnest, and in less than an hour he had been hugged by over 200 people, and he said, "I heard the most beautiful things from people I didn't even see."

It seemed that as more and more people received hugs the bigger the community got. People were laughing and some were crying. They began to get group hugs and take selfies. They were connected somehow in the most beautiful and mysterious way by this one stranger who was willing to open wide his arms to receive them. It reminds me of what the church should be like. I don't know what they were feeling, but I suspect that if only for a moment, they felt whole and loved. They let go of their fear and stepped into the arms of acceptance and trust. Something both the woman and Jairus are doing in our reading today. Something we are invited to do as well.

But the woman suffering from hemorrhages in our story this morning is not huggable. Because of her bleeding, she is an outcast and unclean according to the customs of the day. For 12 years, she has been isolated. She cannot go to the synagogue, she can't share a meal with you, she can't walk anywhere that there are people she might bump into. If she touches you, you too would be unclean for seven days and have to take a ritual bath and be approved by the priest before you could be around people again. She probably hasn't had anyone extend to her the warmth of a human touch for as long as she can remember. She is alone, vulnerable, poor, nameless and without an advocate. But she has heard about Jesus and so she comes. She takes a risk, and while jostling through the crowd around Jesus as he is heading to Jairus' house, she reaches out her hand. As she barely touches the hem of his robe there is a surge of power and healing and she is stunned.

Apparently, Jesus is stunned too, because he knows someone touched him. The woman, who knows she cannot escape Jesus' gaze, comes and falls at his feet. She tells him the truth about her pain and her life. She tells him things we don't get to hear. She tells him the whole truth. A truth that is her truth and not ours. And then he gives her a name. He calls her '*Daughter*' and by so doing he restores her to the community. He restores her to relationship to the whole family. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague." That's John Peterson's translation. (The Message by John Peterson) I can just hear Jesus say to her, "Do you trust me? I trust you. Give me a hug!"

Jairus, by contrast, is the epitome of success and privilege. He is a high-ranking person in the synagogue. He has family and powerful friends. He is financially secure, morally upright, a leader in the community. In fact, he may be at the center of the life of his particular community. He is one of those who might even have been opposed to Jesus' teachings and Sabbath activities. But when his daughter becomes ill and is close to death, his perspective on what is important in life changes, just as it does for us in similar circumstances. The only thing he can think about is saving his child and he will do whatever it takes. I'm sure he must have wondered what his other influential friends and priestly colleagues would think. Would they report him to the higher priestly authorities? Would he be excluded because he turned to this traveling healer Jesus? He is taking a risk with his future, but what does all that matter if he loses his child? And so, he too comes to find this Jesus in the bustling crowd and falls at his feet, begging him to come and heal his daughter. He too, I think, tells the whole truth about his life and his pain and his fear. To which I think Jesus also says, "Do you trust me? I trust you. Give me a hug! and don't be afraid."

These two characters create an interesting contrast for us, don't they? They couldn't be further apart on the social scale. The weak and the strong. The poor and the rich. The powerful and the untouchable. And yet each

finds themselves on their knees before Jesus crying out, as one of my favorite hymns goes, “*I need Thee, O I need Thee; every hour I need Thee! O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.*”

And perhaps the most compelling theme of this story for me is that it reiterates again that Jesus is intent on restoring and reconciling us to wholeness. Not just physical wholeness but wholeness to one another and wholeness to community and wholeness to our future, which is what raising the little girl, is all about. That if we will come like these two believers and tell Jesus the whole truth about ourselves he will give us that hug we so need and restore us to fullness of life in Him.

I guess the question you have to answer for yourself is, “what have you been hemorrhaging from that needs to be touched by Jesus, and what is the whole truth about that, that you will share with him?” And perhaps, what new life is Jesus calling you to. Like the young girl who is on the cusp of beginning her life, Jesus says, “Get up. Stand up! Wake up, and live.” She was asleep and now she has been awakened to new life. What has been sleeping inside of you that needs to wake up? What has metaphorically died in your spirit that needs the touch of God to come alive again? Things I hope you’ll think about this week.

The Good News is that Jesus touches both the high and the low. Those who are unclean, those who are outcast, those excluded from the community, as well as those who live lives of privilege and security. And Jesus breaks all the rules by doing so! Your uncleanness doesn’t mean a thing to him. The judgment of others doesn’t even make him hesitate. Your position in the hierarchy won’t even raise an eyebrow. All that is required of us is to reach out. To have faith and don’t be afraid and reach out your trembling hand and touch the truth, the life, the love, that is Jesus. Who for most of us stands blindfolded in the street with his arms open wide saying, “Do you trust me? I trust you. Give me a Hug!” “*Reach out. Reach out and touch the One!*” *Let us pray.*