

June 27, 2021

This morning, we have two healing stories; an older woman and a young daughter. An interesting feature about this scripture is its narrative structure. We have a story within a story. Jesus is asked to heal the daughter of the leader of the synagogue, and on the way to that home an older woman is healed, and then Jesus continues the journey, and essentially raises the daughter from the dead.

These two healing stories have some interesting contrasts and connections... You might say that taken together, these two stories help to interpret one another.

Both stories involve women. An older woman and a young daughter... And according to Levitical law, both of these women are not to be touched... The older woman has suffered from the hemorrhage; and by the time Jesus arrives to see the daughter she has passed away—she is dead. In both situations, the Levitical law is very clear... They are considered ritualistically unclean, and they are not to be touched.

Quick story, and I think I've told this story before, but it bears repeating...

When I was doing my chaplaincy training at Abbot, I was once asked to visit a woman in quarantine. It was in one of those self-contained reverse pressure rooms.

Absolutely every speck of air was scrubbed and recycled. Whatever it was that she had, they didn't want it to spread!

The nurses gave me a lecture on entering and exiting the patient's room; there was an entering chamber and an exit chamber. They dressed me up with gloves, a gown and a thing over my head with its own air supply. I looked like a space man. They gave me strict instructions not to touch anything, and specifically I was not to touch the patient.

Once I finally got into this woman's room, it was hard to hear what she was saying. She was soft spoken; I had this big thing over my head and there was a little fan whirring in my ear. She was hurting and desperate, and she spoke about regrets and fears. She was physically broken and spiritually dead.

After a while, I gave up trying to hear every word and concentrated instead on topics and listening as her facial expressions changed. I could kind of read what she was saying...

I could tell when she was angry and hurting, and when she was being honest and truthful... I had some idea what she was saying, but not completely.

At one point, I realized, she was done talking, and I really didn't know what to say, so I just mumbled something about saying a prayer. And instinctively she reached out her hand to hold my hand. People do that.

So often, when I'm visiting someone in the hospital and offering prayers, people simply reach out. It's instinctive... I've held hands with macho-men, with women, I've held hands in family prayer circles, I've traced the cross on the foreheads of people who are dying, I have put my hand on people's foreheads and blessed them... I have anointed people with oil... I have put ashes on people's foreheads... In ministry, Touch happens...

And like in our story, it's not so much about touching other people, as much as it's about other people reaching out and needing to be touched! Like the older woman who just needed to reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' garment.

Back to my story, the woman instinctively reached out and I was expressly told not to touch anything in the room, and especially not her... I remember a moment of hesitation... Should I ignore her hand and assume she knew the drill, or should I just take her hand? What would you do?

Well, maybe my heart is bigger than my brains, I don't know, but I took her hand... And I can't remember anything about that prayer, anything, at all... I have no idea what I said...

But I do remember her expression; her face was beaming, radiant and tearful. And as I left that room, I reflected that it really didn't matter one iota, what I said or didn't say; it was all about touching her hand. It was all about making that connection.

Touch matters; connecting matters. It is all about relationship. When life beats us up, when we feel desperate, having another hand to hold is like water for a thirsty soul. Touch is all about love and connection.

When I think about church life, it's all about the journey of being together; of relationship, of connecting and including; of being a community, of loving, kind and gracious people, supporting one another.

Spiritual healing is God's work, and our hands. When the gales of suffering and misery threaten to break us and drive us inward and fearful, God is present to take our hand. Church life is all about connecting and including... Being there for one another...

God touches our lives each and every time we reach out to one another, in love and support.

The good news this morning is that Jesus takes the hand of the young daughter, and she is raised from the dead. And just like that, Jesus also takes us by the hand, and he says to us, do not fear, have faith, have hope, have love.

In the desperate moments of your life, how has God touched you?

Amen.