

“Touching Jesus: Priceless”

Rev. Susan M. Prichard

June 28, 2009

Mark 5: 21-43

Jesus and the disciples had just been on a mission to the other side of the Sea of Galilee; to the region called the Decapolis, which was populated by mostly non-Jews. When they returned home, they were immediately met by a leader of the synagogue with an urgent request. Listen for and hear God’s word to us this morning.

Mark 5: 21-43

We’ve all seen those commercials on television that list off the monetary value of specific purchases. These commercials cover just about every aspect of our contemporary life. They tell the prices of baseball tickets, vacation destinations, ordinary household needs and such. There’s even one that is a spoof on the old McIyver television series where the purchase of tube sox, lip balm, paper clips and such can save you from terrorists. In each and every commercial is a list of items with their cost, but the ending is always the same. The moral of the message is always that the event the purchaser desires, is priceless.

In today’s lesson, there are two stories. Each is a complete healing story by itself. Mark encloses one inside another. Both stories deal with the sensitive issue of ritual purity as well. Jesus has just come from a region that was inhabited by people and animals that were ritually unclean to the Jews. (Because we don’t really appreciate how bad being ritually unclean was, I want you to think every time you hear it: “What would the neighbors think?”) His first encounter after he gets off the boat is an urgent plea from a very important man, who wants Jesus to heal his dying daughter. But even before he can get there, he is touched by a woman in desperate need of healing thus adding to his ritual impurity.

Ralph Milton lists a number of points that are important in this story. “The story inside the story in this passage is quite deliberate. Jairus is a synagogue official who isn’t used to begging for anything, but he is desperate. He has a deep love for his daughter. Important men of that time didn’t normally “waste” their affection on girl children. That is point one.

“Point two is that a hemorrhaging woman pushes her way through the crowd and touches Jesus. She was ritually unclean and should not have been brushing against people in the crowd in the first place, much less touching Jesus.

“Point three. Jesus doesn’t yell at her, which he had every right (by the custom of the time) to do. Instead he says, “Your faith has made you well.” It wasn’t Jesus who healed her. She courageously reached out in faith.

“Jesus is now ritually unclean. But he continues on his way to Jairus’ house. Point four. He doesn’t go and get himself ritually clean first.

“And Jesus keeps walking toward Jairus’ house even though the child is now dead. He goes to her, and (point five) takes her hand. Touching a corpse also makes you ritually unclean.

“Point six. In both cases, Jesus is responding to the needs of the people at the bottom of the social ladder—a menstruating woman and a female child.

“So (according to Milton) the story is not really about healing miracles. The story is about Jesus challenging the laws that worked against the weakest and most vulnerable people.” (Rumors p.2)

Jesus was a most unconventional rabbi. No wonder the religious authorities refused to accept him as the Messiah. Jesus reached out to those who society deemed unfit. In fact, he did much more than just reach out, he touched them—physically touched them, even though it meant that he was ritually unclean. Jesus didn’t stand on ceremonies in that way. He obeyed the laws of Moses and the Temple, but he did not hide behind rules to avoid the needy. People—God’s people—always came first with Jesus.

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? Remember how the religious folks passed by to keep from becoming dirty/ unclean? Jesus always tried to get his disciples and other good people to understand that the needy came first. Healing on the Sabbath came first. Talking to a woman at the well came first. Taking children in his arms and blessing them came first. Preventing a woman from being stoned to death came first.

Imagine that you are Jairus or the unnamed woman in the story. You might be able to list off all the material things you could afford to purchase in life. You could list off the house you lived in, the animals you possessed, the jewels and other valuable items you owned. But I’d venture to say that for both of them ‘touching Jesus’ was what was priceless.

It is often said that we are a spoiled and unappreciative society. It is said that we know the price of everything, but understand the worth of nothing. Jesus is still trying to reach out to us today to help us understand what is important and what is not. If he were to appear before us this morning, what things would we bring to him for healing? Would we be focused on our creature comforts or proper etiquette? Would we dwell on some arbitrary rules, or would we just want to touch him?

Maybe we need to take a page from their book. Maybe we need to get ourselves ritually unclean and touch a few people.

As we approach this long holiday weekend celebrating the birthday of our nation—the one our ancestors hoped would be a light on the hill for all to see—maybe we could spend some time doing for others. Maybe we could give of ourselves and not count the cost. Maybe we would then learn that touching the needy is what being a Christian is all about. When we touch others, we actually touch Jesus, and that, my friends, is priceless.

Thanks be to God. Amen.