

*“Jesus – the Touched One!”*

There is a story about “A business executive” who “became depressed. Things were not going well at work, and he was bringing his problems home with him every night. Every evening he would eat his dinner in silence, shutting out his wife and five-year-old daughter. Then he would go into the den and read the paper using the newspaper to wall his family out of his life.

After several nights of this, one evening his daughter took her little hand and pushed the newspaper down. She then jumped into her father’s lap, wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him strongly. The father said abruptly, ‘Honey, you are hugging me to death!’ **‘No, Daddy,’ the little girl said, ‘I’m hugging you to life!’** (“The Healing of Jairus’ Daughter and the Hemorrhaging Woman” from Sermons.com)

At first, the daddy in that story considered his daughter’s touch to be “hugging me to death!” **It was the toucher – his daughter, who explained the truth, “I’m hugging you to life!”** Can a touch give life? When you read or hear the title of this message, **“Jesus – the Touched One!”** what comes to your mind? There are numerous possible answers. For example, such a comment – “He’s touched” might mean the subject had been inflicted with an evil spirit or a disease. Indeed, some of Jesus’ enemies claimed he was demon possessed! One might think the sermon title comes from a more humorous slant about the hardships Jesus experienced, as a way of commiserating with him.

However, **I chose the sermon title to emphasize the radical nature of Jesus’ openness to being touched, as well as, his commitment to embodying God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love through touching those deemed untouchable by the upstanding religious elite and the society at large.** Today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading shares with us a Scripture, which weaves together, two stories related to Jesus welcoming, receiving, relating to, and touching those two untouchables. So, my intention is for the sermon title to be a declaration of the radical Good News of how Jesus went against the societal and religious norms of his day to provide agape love, healing, forgiveness, and life to those cast out or rejected because of their illnesses and/or life conditions – who they were.

Rev. Kathryn Matthews (Huey) writes, “You might say that these two incidents together help us to understand each of them. They both involve women in crisis – in fact, we don’t know them by their names but by their needs – both ‘daughters’ of Abraham, neither one an outsider to begin with but both now subject to the taboos around the mysterious power of life (blood) and the even more mysterious (and seemingly unconquerable) power of death.” Matthews sums up, “Bleeding women and dead girls should not be touched, at the risk of conveying their uncleanness to others.” (Weekly Seeds for June 28, 2015, “Healing Powers” Reflection by Rev. Kathryn Matthews (Huey), Dean of Amistad Chapel at the national offices of the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio)

**Let’s take a few moments to look at today’s Scripture with particular interest in the matter of touching Jesus or of him touching another in need.** First, consider what Mark reported as the thoughts of the woman who had suffered an illness of bleeding constantly for 12 years. **Please note those places where I have underlined a word or words in the Scripture quotations. In verses 27-29, we are told, “She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him, saying to herself, ‘If I just touch his clothes, I will get well.’ She touched his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was healed of her trouble.”**

This desperate woman knew touching Jesus would be a great scandal – first because she was an unrelated woman and second because her bleeding condition made her religiously unclean. Perhaps, she thought only touching Jesus’ clothing would go unnoticed, for he was focused on traveling to Jairus’ home and was surrounded – pressed in upon by a large crowd. Yet, Jesus did notice! **Verse 30 reported, “At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”**

It was at that moment when the woman discerned what had happened and the very special nature of Jesus' relationship with God's power of healing and life. Ironically, it was also at that same time when Jesus' male disciples showed they did not discern Jesus' identity and purpose! **In verse 31, Mark explained, "His disciples answered, 'You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?'"** The healed woman might have tried to use the disciples' failure to perceive the nature of Jesus' great sensitivity, as an opportunity to slip away from the potential ridicule and rejection she expected from the crowd because she touched an unrelated man, while she was bleeding. But, she didn't. The Gospel of Mark continued in **verses 32-34, "But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. The woman realized what had happened to her, so she came, trembling with fear, knelt at his feet, and told him the whole truth. Jesus said to her, 'My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your trouble.'"**

It was during that same interruption of Jesus' trip to Jairus' home that the leader of the local synagogue received devastating news. Jesus had set out on that journey because of Jairus' plea for help. **In verses 22-23 we were informed Jairus, "threw himself down at his feet and begged him earnestly, 'My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!'"** Mark shared the bad news given to the father in **verse 35, "While Jesus was saying this (finishing his conversation with the healed woman), some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, 'Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?'"**

It may not seem so to everyone else, but to me, what Jesus did next was utterly extraordinary – no other religious leader would have made the effort! **Mark continued in verse 36, "Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him, 'Don't be afraid, only believe.' Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John."** With no opportunity to see the girl for himself, Jesus boldly decided to continue on his mission to take care of Jairus' daughter. Jesus was not looking for public glory in this, as was demonstrated by his limiting those who continued on with him to those three disciples.

Arriving at Jairus' home, the scene was one of great mourning. Jesus challenged the need for the mourning, to lay the groundwork, perhaps, so the parents, instead of proclaiming Jesus had raised her from the dead, could say he healed their daughter. The crowd of mourners was not open to Jesus' claim the girl was merely sleeping. **Mark reported in verses 40-41, "They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha, koum,' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up!'"**

The Gospel of Mark frequently reported Jesus ordered witnesses to not tell anyone about his miracles. This Text follows that pattern. **In verses 42-43, Mark stated, "She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed. But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, 'Give her something to eat.'"**

The Pharisees and their legalist allies would have chastised Jesus for touching either the bleeding woman or the dead girl! Their insults, attacks, and demands did not control Jesus. He did not care about their threats nor their support. Instead, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, was committed to embodying God's Self-Giving and Suffering Agape Love for all people, even you and me and all persons, regardless of human distinction. **Yes, Jesus Christ was and is the Touched One – he is the Love, Healing, and Life Giving Presence of God through which our separation from God, one another, and all people is overcome with Love, Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Healing, and Life!**

Rev. Kathryn Matthews (Huey) wrote, "The question we have to ask ourselves, as individuals and as the church, is whether they (those experiencing suffering, especially illness and the process of dying) are outside our concern." She concludes, **"Jesus refuses to keep himself removed from those who are declared unclean by religious authorities, and clearly, he calls us to follow in those same ways."** (Weekly Seeds for June 28, 2015, "Healing Powers" Reflection by Rev. Kathryn Matthews (Huey), Dean of Amistad Chapel at the national offices of the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio) **Let us, like Jesus, live touched with reference to our relationships with God, one another, and all people! Amen.**