

“THE STORY OF TWO TOUCHES”

Mark 5:21-43 July 15th, 2018

Today we are going to look at the story of two touches and the power they had on a whole community. This is the first message in a sermon series titled “Healing Hands.” This series follows Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and John as his ministry begins to take shape and become known through the land.

Let’s dive into our story. It’s a story about three main characters: Jesus and two women found in in our scripture reading today from Mark.

First, let’s look at Jesus. Jesus was a Rockstar. Wherever Jesus went he always had a huge crowd following him around. Have you noticed that? Imagine taking Dr. Phil, Oprah Winfrey, the Beatles, Billy Graham, and David Jeremiah, mashing them all together and multiplying it by 100. That’s the kind of fame that Jesus had in the first half of his ministry.

Have you heard of the Jesus Roller Coaster? You can describe the shape of Jesus’ story by thinking of a roller coaster. The first half of his life was a climb to the peak of popularity, which came to its climax at the transfiguration. Then, after that event, Jesus starts heading to Jerusalem and his teaching becomes very intense, and the people turn on him. This is one way to look at the Gospel of Mark. You can see that the crowds are a mob of fans in the first half of the story, then they turn into a lynch mob in the second half. Today, we are still on the popularity side of the story.

There are three reasons that Jesus was really popular. We will call them the three “P’s” of Jesus’ popularity. They are his Preaching, Power and Parables. The people loved his preaching because he taught with authority. He boldly proclaimed this message that we will come back to again and again. “The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel.”

Jesus taught in parables. He told stories that invite people who “have ears to hear,” who are the “good soil” to lean in and explore the deep mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

In chapters 2, 3, and 5 of Mark, we see Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick. You take a guy who can mesmerize people with his teaching and combine it with someone who can heal the sick and restore the tortured soul, and you’ve got..a rock star.

Today we are looking at one scene where Jesus demonstrates this amazing power. In Mark 5:21-43 we see that Jesus heals two women. It is the story of two touches. One woman is 12 years old and has a life-threatening fever. The other woman is older and has a twelve-year old disease.

Here's the story. Let's start with the girl. This is not just any girl. This is the leader of the synagogue. He's a big deal in town. That means his daughter is probably a big deal, too. If this were Downton Abbey, she would be like Lady Mary. On a bigger scale, she would be like the President's daughter (if he had a daughter instead of a son).

She's twelve years old. To be twelve in an ancient Jewish village would be equivalent to being 17-20 years old in our culture. She is just about to become a fully adult woman in society. Think about this for a minute. Imagine if one of those imaginary daughters of the President developed a life-threatening disease. What do you think the President would do? I'm sure they would go to the ends of the earth to find the best doctor to come and help her.

If you were the doctor that the President asked to come and help his child, how would you react? If it were me, I'd probably reschedule all my appointments and fly to D. C. especially if they offered to get me there on Air Force One.

That's kind of what's going on here in verse 21-24. Jairus is the big man in town. He is so worried about his daughter that he walks up to Jesus, in the middle of a huge crowd, and falls at his feet and actually begs Jesus to come and heal her from her fever.

So here you have a very popular girl. She's Jairus' daughter. She's probably the Belle of the Ball. Everyone knows her. Everyone is worried. She's the center of the crowd's attention. And Jesus starts walking to the house.

Then something happens. And this is so Mark! Mark often intertwines two stories to communicate one message. It has been described as a "Markan sandwich." He tells one story—the top piece of bread. Then he switches to the second story—the meat in the middle. And then he comes back to the first story for the bottom piece of bread. And just like eating a sandwich, when you take a bite you don't taste just the bread or just the meat in the middle—you taste the savory combination of the two. In the same way, Mark serves two stories, one within the other, in order to deliver his message.

Back now to the second story, inside the story of Jairus and his daughter. Another woman enters the scene. Who is she?

She has had a hemorrhage for 12 years. Now, with our modern ears, we hear that and think, “Oh, that’s a bummer,” but it’s not that big of a deal. So, we need to take a moment and try to get a grasp on what is really happening here.

These are Jewish people who follow the Laws of Moses very carefully. The Law states that when a woman is in her menstrual cycle she is unclean. An unclean person must remove herself from the population and live in isolation until she becomes clean again. In the case of the normal cycle, this was designed to protect the woman, to keep her husband away from her during this unpleasant time and to give her time alone. She would go live in the “Red Tent” while she waited for her cycle to pass, and then she would do the purification ceremony and be good to go until the next month.

Now, imagine if your cycle never stopped...for twelve years. The woman had been in the “Red Tent” of isolation for 12 years. No one had touched her...for twelve years.

I wonder who those people are today. Who in our society has been pushed so far to the margins that they are untouchable? Two relational therapists discovered that there is a huge amount of touch deprivation in our society. Rev. Steve Thomason tells about a story his father told him about a widow in the church that he pastored. He gave her a hug after service and she said, “That is the only hug I get all week.” We long to be touched.

This woman musters up her courage, pushes through the crowd, and touches the hem of Jesus’ cloak. He stops. In the middle of the swarming crowd, “Who touched me?” He sees this woman. He sees the longing, the desperation, and the courage it took for her to do what she did. He stoops down, touches her, and says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well.”

Just then a messenger comes from Jairus’ house. Jesus took too long. The girl is dead. Here an interesting thing happens. Jesus leaves the crowd. He takes only a select few with him into the room with the dead girl. And he touches her.

Let’s look at these two touches for a moment.

In both cases, these were forbidden touches. The Law of Moses clearly stated that, if a person touches a Red Tent woman or a dead body, then that person would become unclean. The uncleanness is the powerful agent here. But when Jesus touches the unclean thing...the power is reversed. This is the power of Jesus' touch. To make that which the law declared as unclean to be clean.

I'd like to make one more observation about this story.

Notice what has to happen to these two women in order to be made clean.

The woman who has been on the margins of community has to come into the center of the community in order to receive the touch of God and be made clean. All the people that she touched as she moved toward the center were technically tainted by her presence as she pressed in to find Jesus.

Jairus daughter, on the other hand, who enjoyed the limelight and the privilege of living in the center of the community, has to move outside of the community. She had to die. Jesus had to meet her in the darkness of isolation before she could receive his healing touch and be brought back to life.

I don't think these are accidental details in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has come to turn the world upside down. The Kingdom of God calls the marginalized to be brought into the community and calls the elite and privileged to experience the death of that status.

Why? So that we can all have life and be made clean.

Marcina Wiederkehr has penned a beautiful poem about this daughter in her book *Seasons of Your Heart*. It reads:

Once there was a wound
It was no ordinary wound
It was *my* wound
We had lived together long.

I yearned to be free of this wound

I wanted the bleeding to stop

Yet if the truth be known
I felt a strange kind of gratitude for this wound
It made me tremendously open to grace
vulnerable to God's mercy.

A beautiful believing in me
that I have named Faith
kept growing, daring me
to reach for what I could not see.

This wound had made me open,
I was ready for grace
And so, one day, I reached.

There I was thick in the crowd
bleeding and believing
and I reached.

At first I reached
for what I *could* see
the fringe of a garment,

But my reaching didn't stop there
for Someone reached back into
me.

A grace I couldn't see
flowed through me.

A power I didn't understand
began to fill the depths of me.

Trembling I was called forth
to claim my wholeness.

The bleeding had left me.

The believing remained.

And strange as this may sound

I have never lost my gratitude

for the wound

that made me so open

to grace.

So, here's the challenge today.

We say, again and again, the we are the Body of Christ. It's God's Work, our hands.

How Do You Need to Be Touched By God Today?

Who Needs Your Touch Today?