



“WHO TOUCHED ME?”

Mark 5:21-43



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Who Touched You?

Have you ever had one of those days? You're trying to get something done, and you're constantly interrupted? Of course, sometimes we *want* to be interrupted – I can't tell you how many other things I can find to do while I'm supposed to be working on my sermon!

But sometimes, just when we're getting *productive*, just when we feel like we might actually turn that 'to-do' list into a 'ta-da!' list, just when we're "in the zone," a stream of people knock on the door, or call on the phone, or just need a few minutes of your time.

We teach our children that interrupting is rude. Of course then we interrupt them all the time to correct them... But it is an important lesson. Children imagine that all of their concerns demand immediate attention. I want it and I want it now! (Unlike adults.) My mother would joke that my brothers and I wouldn't need anything from her for hours, until she would get a phone call, and suddenly all three of us needed her; all of us were interrupting her, seeking her attention. What responses do we hear parents giving an interrupting child: "Not now." "In a little bit." "Just a minute." Or my personal favorite, "I'll think about it."

Or, think of that one person that when you see them, your mind races to find some excuse, some ruse to avoid them – because you know that you have only five minutes before you have to be somewhere, and conversations with this person never last less than an hour. You know what I'm talking about! Where an interruption won't be just a pause in your day but everything will come to a screeching halt?

Today's gospel lesson from Mark finds Jesus being interrupted while he's in the middle of another interruption. Jesus has traveled from the Gentile community, across the Sea of Galilee, and finds crowds waiting for him on his arrival back on the Jewish side. The crowd included a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, and probably part of the group who didn't usually welcome Jesus and his teachings with open arms.

But, Jairus, it seems, has no such qualms about Jesus, at least not right now. Jairus' daughter is sick, and he knows -- he believes fully that Jesus' touch will heal her. Jesus doesn't hesitate, but follows Jairus to his home.

On the way there, the crowds continue to follow him. In this crowd we discover a nameless woman suffering for some twelve years from hemorrhages. We learn that she has seen ‘many physicians’ and has spent all her money on healthcare to no avail. She tries to get to Jesus in the crowd, just to touch his clothes, confident she will be made well. She reaches out, touches his cloak, and is healed *immediately*.

Jesus knows he’s been touched – he can feel it. He looks to see who touched him. The disciples discourage him, wanting to get on with it, get going. But he stops, and takes a minute to seek her out, although I imagine it wouldn’t be too hard to spot an untouchable woman in a crowd that won’t go near her.

“In fear and trembling” she comes forward, and tells him what she did, quite different from the privilege we see in Jairus’ bold, face to face request. Jesus says to her, with gentleness, “daughter,” – the only woman Jesus ever refers to as daughter, by the way – “your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Then, while he’s still speaking, as if they want to give him a hard time for letting some woman interrupt him, people come from Jairus’ house and tell him that the girl has died, and not to bother coming. Jesus’ answer is simple, “Do not fear, only believe.” He continues to the house, and on entering asks the mourners, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.”

Of course, they laugh at him. It may only be the first century but these people surely know the difference between sleep and death. Jesus sends them all outside, and takes the child’s hand, and says, “little girl, get up.” He touches her. Because she’s dead, you see, the girl and her father are both unclean. And *immediately* she gets up. And they were all properly amazed.

We see Jesus as a healer again and again in the scriptures, and in this passage we get both a healing and a resurrection. A reminder of Jesus’ powerful ability to bring healing to our lives -- when we let him.

But this text has a unique structure. It’s a story within a story – a healing within a healing – and I think we can learn from the very structure of the story itself – from the fact that Jesus heals one woman while *on his way* to see another. This is a story of what Jesus does when he gets interrupted; which is about all the time, because that’s where most of Jesus’ ministry happens -- in the interruptions!

A friend once told me that one of the things that frustrates her most is when people say they 'don't have time.' She insists that if we really want to do something, we'll find the time. That if we're honest, we'd just say, "That's not a priority for me right now."

But, I suspect many of us – and I confess, I do it, too – we say: "I don't have time." We think that sounds so much better. It sounds so much better than saying, "this thing that you are asking me to do isn't as important to me right now as other things I've chosen to do with my time."

When is the last time you told someone you didn't have time? What were they asking you to do? Would it have been more honest to say that it wasn't a priority for you right then? Would you dare? I often think of my friend, and I try to remember what I really mean when I think I don't have time.

I'm amazed, in ministry, at how often it is the gift of time that people find most valuable. When I visit people in hospitals or in their homes, people know I can't fix their problems for them, no matter how badly I want to. What I can do though, is give them my time – sit with them and just listen, without filling the time with empty clichés.

We ministers fancy it up and call it a "ministry of presence." *Being* there with someone. When one of us – clergy and lay people alike – spends time visiting a shut-in or hospitalized member of our community – the time spent is so valued by the person being visited. Honestly, I'm a little embarrassed sometimes how thankful someone can be when all I've done is spend thirty or forty minutes with them. All I did was show up!

It makes me wonder...what we're normally communicating to each other, if people feel like we've done something *extra*-ordinary by giving them a tiny bit of our time.

One of the only things Jesus ever seemed to ask of anyone for himself was just before he was betrayed and arrested. Jesus was spending time in the garden praying. Again and again, he asked the disciples to stay awake, to stay with him. But they can't do it. They're too tired, they're too overwhelmed, they're too emotionally spent. Well, at least they don't tell him they were too busy!

Jesus isn't asking any of them to solve his problems – they can't. He's asking that, while he's grieving what he has to go through, he could be surrounded by people who love him. He simply asks for their presence. Their time. Their company.

In fact, how we are present or *not* present with one another, how we do or don't see each other is the measure by which we are judged, Jesus says. Remember the parable of the sheep and goats? Notice, when Jesus talks about what separates the sheep from the goats, the king *doesn't* say: You *sent* me food and drink, you *sent* me clothing. No, the exchange between the king and the people revolves around whether they saw the king, or did not see the king, while they were *spending time with other people*.

It's the time spent visiting, the time spent caring for the sick, the time spent welcoming the stranger – face to face time – that touches people, that Jesus notes as significant. In order to see Jesus in people you have to actually see them -- to spend some time with them!

What is it that touches people when we give our time to someone? Why might someone be so grateful – so touched -- for thirty little minutes of our time? I suspect, it is as my friend said: that our time says that something is a priority. And making something a priority says that that 'something' -- whatever it is, person or event or activity – that that 'something' is worth our time. It's valuable.

That's the key. That's what Jesus is all about in his ministry – letting people know – particularly the ones who have been told *otherwise* over and over again – often through the actions of those claiming to be closest to God – letting people know that they are worthy. That they are valuable.

The question then is, "What does how we spend our time say about *who* we find valuable? Who do we consider "worthy?" I suspect for most of us, it's our families and friends that top the list. They're certainly on the top of my list. But the scriptures remind us that we can't pat ourselves on the back for that – even the wicked take care of "their own."

Who *else* is worth your time? Who *else* have you made a priority? And perhaps, some harder questions: Are only certain people – certain *kinds* of people – worth your time? Who *hasn't* made the cut?

Jesus spent huge chunks of his time with the most vulnerable. He doesn't have money to send them. He's not adored by the poor, the sinners, the outcasts because he's giving them things. No, he gives them *himself*. He gives them *value* and *worth* because he *knows* them, and spends time with them -- and lets them interrupt him!

Jesus' ministry is all about the interruptions. Everything seems to happen when he's *on the way* somewhere. He's on his way somewhere when he sees Zacchaeus in a tree, so he makes spontaneous dinner plans with him. He's eating dinner with people when a woman interrupts them, anointing Jesus' feet with oil. He's right in the middle of teaching when a man gets lowered through the roof to be healed.

He's on his way to heal a sick girl when he's interrupted by a woman who needs healing, and disciples who don't consider the woman worthy of Jesus' time. But Jesus always seems to have time. The woman is healed *immediately*. And a girl to be healed becomes a girl restored to life – but Jesus can do that too -- and when Jesus touches her hand she gets up *immediately*. You see, each and every person – in this story, two people who were ritually unclean and untouchable – each and every person is worth it to Jesus – is valuable.

It is my sincere belief that Jesus would stop in his tracks for me – and for you. He would be interrupted for you. You're worthy of God's time, right now. And you're worthy of Jesus' touch. I think Jesus wants to touch us so we can pass on that touch. Take the time, be interrupted. Who knows how you could touch – or have already touched -- the lives of others?

Who will you allow to interrupt you?

Amen.