

### "Touched"

My daughter and son-in-law returned from their honeymoon in Aruba earlier this week. During the short time they were at our house before heading back to Phoenix, they showed us their pictures and told us about their trip. From what we saw and heard, it seemed like an ideal honeymoon. That is until they told us about the plane ride back home. For starters they were not able to sit together. According to my daughter she was seated in the aisle seat beside a rather portly couple and couldn't make the slightest move without getting uncomfortably close to woman beside her. My son-in-law had an even more uncomfortable situation. His seat was a few rows behind his new bride and he was sitting between a couple. But that was the least of his problems. Apparently, the man sitting in the aisle seat beside him spent a great deal of time picking at a scab on his elbow. And this picking obviously led to bleeding, which led to blood on the armrest. And as things go with airplane seating, this armrest was supposed to be shared by both of them! According to my new son-in-law, he spent most of the flight trying his best not to touch that armrest, which meant at certain times, he was leaning so far to the other side that he was actually getting uncomfortably close to the man's wife who was sitting by the window.

I tell you this story because it made me think of the woman in our gospel reading today. And no, it wasn't because she had a problem with blood and so did my son-in-law. It was because of the significance, and really the consequences, of a human touch. Touching people in public, especially people we don't know is kind of weird for all of us. Whether we're on a plane, on a bus, sitting on a park bench, or just waiting in line, we tend to get very uncomfortable when people get so close to us. And yet in the account of this poor woman who seemed so hopeless, her final attempt for healing meant she would throw any notion of comfort or societal expectations out the window. This woman would risk what was left of her life— a life that was slowly being drained from her body — in order to publicly touch a stranger.

It's a dramatic scene St Mark records. A great crowd was following Jesus to a ruler of the synagogue's house whose daughter was dying. But on the way this woman kind of comes out of nowhere and interrupts the anxious mob. She had been suffering from

blood loss for 12 years. She spent all she had on every doctor and healer who would see her, but she wasn't getting better, she was getting worse! But she heard the reports about Jesus, reports that this man could miraculously heal. Could she really try to get his attention? I mean when you think about it from her perspective, it was a terrifying plan. She had been hemorrhaging for 12 years, which according to Levitical law meant that she had been ritually unclean for 12 years! And being ritually unclean had tremendous consequences, especially when it came to other people. Touch someone, and they were prohibited from having social contact with anyone else for the rest of the day. The bottom line is due to her condition this woman wasn't supposed to be out in public, let alone pushing her way through a crowd.

But she did it anyway. In the chaos surrounding the mob trying to get to the ruler of the synagogue's house, she pursued Jesus of Nazareth speaking the words under her breath, "if I touch even his garments, I will be made well." And that's exactly what she did. She came up from behind him and barely touched his robe. And immediately the flow of blood dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Her plan, as terrifying and risky as it might have been, worked. She was healed.

Now at this point, we can imagine her kind of slipping away trying not to get noticed. She got what she needed. But the text stops us from making any assumptions about an escape. Mark tells us that Jesus makes a scene, immediately turning to the crowd, asking "who touched my garments?" The disciples get all testy with him saying, "you see all these people here all who are over each other and you're asking "who touched me?" But Jesus ignored them. He looked around to see who had done it and the gig was up. The woman was busted. "Fearful and trembling, she fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth." She probably told him about her desperation. She probably told him how she knew what she did was a violation of the law. Maybe she even told him that she believed he was the promised Messiah. Whatever the whole truth was, he already knew. Somehow he knew. And his response? "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace; and be healed of your disease."

It's an amazing story of faith isn't it? It's also one of those curious accounts in the Bible that we might struggle to understand how it applies to our lives of faith. On the one hand it's tempting to kind of stay in this safe zone of "Jesus interacted with untouchables and restored them to community and so we should do the same to those who are metaphorically untouchable today." And this isn't wrong, but it kind of puts us on the same level as Jesus. And on the other hand we can just hit it head on—faith in Jesus is

the divinely appointed means God uses to grant miracle cures, which is absolutely true. It could happen for any us. Then again it might not.

But you know what? We don't have to struggle with how our lives of faith intersect with this woman's life of faith because we already have the answer. And it all has to do with being touched. Not the kind of touch the newlyweds experienced on the plane ride home mind you, but the healing touch that only comes from contact with God the Son. And this contact is the same for us as it was the woman. Jesus was the Almighty God in the flesh living among his people. But he didn't live to avoid the unclean—he lived to touch them. He literally held those who were beyond hope. He gathered all the untouchables, including you and me, and made them pure for his father in heaven. Jesus took hold of all sickness, shame, sin, and most importantly death and died as the one and only untouchable sinner. He rose from the dead, which means that his life and touch are the beautiful reality for the unclean once more. That's how our lives intersect with this woman's and thank God for it!

May we may be so bold as her and take hold of Jesus knowing he will never let us go. May we taste eternal life and go in peace every time our Lord touches our lips with his holy meal. May we feel his forgiving touch today and forever. Amen.