

6 Pentecost, Proper 8

July 1, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24 God does not delight in the death of the living

2 Cor 8:7-15

Paul encourages Corinthians to share with other believers who are in need

Mark 5:21-43

Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from death, heals a bleeding woman

Jesus healed two women in the Gospel reading today. He healed both of them by touch; by touch that was against the law. He healed the woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. That ailment made her 'unclean', and by laws set out in Leviticus, she was to touch no one, not attend church, and keep herself away from other people – in this case, for twelve years.

Of course, Jesus ignored the regulation, and healed her; which not only healed her bleeding disorder, but it gave her life back to her. She could rejoin her family and her friends – she could have a fullness of life she had not been able to enjoy for twelve years. Jesus told her that her faith had healed her.

Jesus also healed the young daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the local synagogue. He healed her by touching her; which was also against the law. Leviticus forbids touching a dead body, which makes one 'unclean'.

Again Jesus ignored the regulation, and healed her, in this case by bringing her from death back to life. Jesus had told Jairus not to worry, but to have faith. The interesting dimension to that, is that the faith of Jairus had a role in the healing of someone else. Jesus was confirming the power of intercessory prayer.

When Ruth's father was in his eighties, a few serious illnesses started ganging up on his body, and he knew that he was dying. Ruth and our younger daughter Laurie went back to northern New York to visit him. He told Ruth that he was afraid to die. He wasn't sure he believed hard enough in heaven, and it scared him. Ruth told her dad, 'Don't be worried about having enough faith, dad. I have enough faith for both of us.' That gave Chuck a lot of peace to handle the rest of his life in peace.

Your faith and mine are forces that God recognizes in answering prayer. Your faith and mine are forces that can change the lives of other people.

An element that I want us to recognize from the two people who were healed today, was the presence of touch in their healing. For the young daughter of Jairus, touch brought physical life. For the woman, touch brought fullness of life; both physical and relational. Touch...

Jesus used touch many, many times in his healing; of an insane hermit, an expert in religious law, a fisherman, a king, a poor widow, a rich man, a blind beggar... one list I found included 33 incidents of Jesus touching someone. In each of these cases, touch carried divine power.

Years ago Ruth was in the hospital to undergo a surgery. After the surgery, she was placed in a room with one other patient. Her roommate had dementia, and talked into the air; upsetting the staff and other patients because it was non-stop, loud, day and night. Within a few hours after surgery, as you may know, they have patients up and walking. So Ruth was up and walking, and went to her roommate, touched her forehead, and ran her hand across the top of her head, as she talked to her. This woman with dementia immediately stopped talking into the air, made quiet responses to Ruth, and laid quietly, with a look of peace on her face. Touch is deeply, deeply powerful.

And touch doesn't have to be physical touch to be powerful. Listen to this true story I found about mentally touching another person:

“About ten years ago we saw Jesus in the Amish [Pennsylvania] community. Charlie Roberts walked into a one-room schoolhouse near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and opened fire. He killed five children and wounded five others. Then he took his own life. Charlie's mother Terri will never forget that day. Her husband said, “I'll never be able to face my Amish neighbors again.”

A few days later, the Robertses buried their son in a small, private ceremony. As they came to the gravesite, they saw forty members of the Amish community approaching. They enfolded the Roberts family in a semi-circle, extending forgiveness and sharing grief.

In their sorrow and shame and loneliness the Robertses came looking for Jesus that day, whether they knew it or not. All they got was the Amish. And on that day, that small, wounded group of Amish were the real Jesus.

That's who we want to be for the addict and the parolee, for the lonely teenager and the disabled vet, for the cynical banker and the calloused farmer, for the streetwalker and the street cleaner.

We want to bring healing and compassion and peace to over-scheduled families and exhausted night-shift workers. To blue lives and black lives. To bow-tied professionals and professional slackers.

We want to be Jesus to whomever we meet.”

This mother and father were touched by the care, compassion, and forgiveness of the people of their community. That is what our faith tradition teaches us. That is what brings fullness into our own lives.

How do you 'touch' the lives of the people around you?

Our faith in Jesus connects us to the power that can change the course of life; our own life and others. Jesus invites us to him. He said, “Do not fear, only believe.”

Amen.