Come to Your Senses During Lent – Noticing the Presence of God.

The Power of Touch

Psalm 8:1, 3-5 March 23, 2025

 Mark 5:25-34 Kimby Young

During Lent, we have been thinking about our human senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste. Today as we talk about touch – my sermon idea shifted a little bit. It’s not so much about using your senses to grow closer to God. Today’s scripture makes me think about how Jesus used his senses as he lived his fully human life.

Think about the power of touch in our lives. A mother and baby, a father and child, the hug of a friend, holding hands with someone you love, holding a hand of someone in a hospital bed. A touch can express so much, even more than words can communicate. And even more the power of touch can help you through a difficult moment, soothe a pain, offer a connection, bring comfort and strength. Think about the power of touch.

In this story, the touch of Jesus is central. Well known by this time in the gospel as a healer, Jesus is surrounded by crowds of people asking Jesus to touch them and heal them. The people may not have known what was happening, but they knew that Jesus had power in his touch – that he could bring healing and hope and new life. Perhaps they understood that Jesus could connect them to God. And they wanted that.

Now in this story the miracle of Jesus touch was reversed. The woman believed so much in the power of Jesus. She so wanted to be healed, that she was certain Jesus didn't even have to be intentional in his touch to bring healing. She believed she could channel that healing just by reaching out to Jesus. The miracle, she believed, could be grasped in her touch, not only in the touch of Jesus. The power of God could flow through Jesus into her. She believed. She could make the effort and she could receive the power of God through Jesus Christ. She so wanted to touch Jesus, to change her life, to save her life, really.

You've probably heard this story before. Maybe you've heard some of the meaning behind it. Maybe you've heard about the purity laws of the day which declared that blood was unclean. Therefore any woman during her period and for several days after would be unclean. To be unclean means that a person cannot associate with anyone else, except others who are also unclean, for anyone who touched an unclean person (even accidentally) would be declared unclean as well. So no community, barred from the sanctuary, not allowed to touch or be touched by anyone, except other people in a similar unclean state of being. You can imagine what she was going through for 12 years. You can imagine the exclusion. You can imagine the pain. You can imagine the physical exhaustion of such an illness. Some of you , perhaps, can imagine all too well what this woman was going through – because perhaps you or a loved one have struggled with a chronic or long term illness – cancer, MS, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, Crohn’s, lupus, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis – the list is all too long. You know the suffering, the struggle, the weariness. For this woman – 12 years. 12 – the number symbolizing completeness, wholeness, infinity. So whether actual years or symbolic years – the author is saying – this woman experienced absolute, complete, unrelenting, all-consuming suffering. A lifetime of suffering with no imagination that it will end. How could she carry on? How could she survive? How could she find hope? But she did hope. She thought – if I could only touch Jesus. Into that hope she placed all her energy. And beyond hope – she took action – to move, to reach, to push forward, to take a risk – all to touch Jesus. She knew that touch would make all the difference. She believed that touch would heal her and bring a whole new life.

Something miraculous happens at that moment of touch – something unexpected and inspiring and full of grace. Of course, there's the physical miraculous healing. But even more profound is Jesus' reaction to this woman's touch. First, it's important, as the disciples point out, that he even noticed in such a crowd. Jesus was being pushed and touched from all sides. But Jesus knew this touch was different – it was not about a bustling crowd, but about life and hope, and a whole new beginning. This woman didn't want to be noticed – we don't even know her name. Perhaps she didn't want to be noticed because she was shy, but more likely because she didn't want to draw attention to herself or cause trouble for Jesus. Remember she was declared unclean. And if it was known that Jesus had come into contact with her – Jesus would have been declared unclean for a period of time. He would have broken a purity law. He would have been barred from the temple, or even not permitted to touch others with his healing hands. Perhaps she thought Jesus would be mad. But more likely she thought that the crowd or the keepers of the law would use it against Jesus. So she planned to just make the connection and then slip away. But once the connection was made, instead of just letting her slip away, Jesus called attention to her. Jesus wanted a public acknowledgement of power and healing for a woman who had for so long been publicly humiliated, shunned and scorned. Jesus wanted everyone to know what had happened in order to give her immediate power and relief. Because she touched Jesus - she was clean, she was strong, she was whole. She was loved. Jesus wanted everyone to know right away. Once the connection was made with God through Jesus, never again would she be separated from her community, from God's grace, from a blessed and beautiful life. Jesus made it clear that it was her faith and her action that returned wholeness to this woman AND to her community. Because she wanted to touch Jesus, she now had the power to touch everyone with blessing.

That's really what faith is all about, what grace is all about. Of course, it includes private joy, individual satisfaction, internal peace and personal salvation. But our faith does not end with ourselves and our own concerns. God's grace, God's blessing is not given to us to satisfy our own private wants and needs. It's not all about me. We receive so that we are able to give. We are blessed in order to be a blessing.

For this woman, the touch of Christ did not end with her miraculous healing. In fact, that was only the beginning of the story. Yes, she was able to touch Jesus. But then, wonder of wonders, she was able to touch others in her community – that simple act which had been forbidden to her for a lifetime. Jesus gave her the power to touch others with the hope she had within her, and perhaps to transform lives with the love she had come to know.

Isn't the same true for us? We who have touched Jesus. We who have been touched by God's love. We have the power to touch others with the love of God in Jesus Christ our Savior.

This season of Lent is a call to awareness – awareness of your own senses, awareness of what you sense in the world around you, awareness of God’s presence with you and everywhere you go. I can’t even count how many things I touch in a single week. How many people do you touch or how many people touch you? Around here, you are liable to get a hug or two. If you live alone, perhaps you go quite some time between touches. I take you back to where this sermon started. Holding a hand, touching a heart, soothing a pain, offering a connection.

This is the gift of Jesus Christ. This is the true miracle of God’s grace. We are able to connect. We are able to touch God and reach others. We have been given the gift of God’s love. Be intentional in the week ahead. Share that gift of God’s love. In the name of Jesus Christ.

March 23 2025

Psalm 8:1, 3-5

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,

and crowned them with glory and honor.

Mark 5:21b-34

And a large crowd followed Jesus and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my cloak?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ ” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.