

Jim Gill

Immigration Sunday
 "The Power of Touch"

July 1, 2018

2 Samuel 1:1;17-27 Mark 5:21-34 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

INTRODUCTION TO 2 SAMUEL 1:1; 17-27

We've been following David's life, from the time he was anointed by Samuel to the time that he killed Goliath, to the time he was crowned King to the time he brought the ark of the covenant back into Jerusalem dancing up a storm. This morning's passage tells how David responded the news that his predecessor King Saul and his dear friend Jonathan had fallen on their swords and died. Hear the word of the Lord from 2 Samuel 1:1 1-27

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 5:21-34; 6:53-56

This passage is about a woman was surrounded by a crowd that wanted nothing to do with her. She was ill and her illness had forced her into open air solitary confinement. Her only hope was to reach out and touch this man she had heard about named Jesus. Hear the word of God from Mark 5:21-34.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, thank you for this glimpse into your power to heal. We pray that as we meditate on this portion of your healing ministry that we will be able to reach out and touch you; and draw what we need from you. Amen.

How I spent my summer vacation. Anne had a conference in Washington D.C. She has been there many times and for the first time I got to tag along. I missed Vacation Bible School, but I've heard great things. While Anne was cooped up in committee meetings I got to go to the Tower at the Smithsonian, and the American History Museum. Together we went to the Smithsonian Art Museum, the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, the archeological digs in Jamestown, the battlegrounds in Fredericksburg and Yorktown and the grounds of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. In the museums I saw a lot of chairs but no place to sit. They all had ribbons on them and some had placards that plainly said, "Do Not Sit."

There once was a museum that was having trouble with people touching and soiling priceless furniture and art. People could not resist ignoring the "Do Not Touch" signs. But the problem evaporated overnight when a clever museum employee replaced the signs with ones that read: "Extreme Caution: Wash Hands After Touching!" They didn't have any more problems with people touching.

The story in our gospel lesson was one of a woman who reached out to touch someone, but she thought she wasn't worthy to actually touch him. The most she could dare was to touch his hem.

This woman had been seeping blood for twelve years, what doctors today would call a hemorrhage. Even worse, Leviticus 15 denoted such a woman as "unclean." What this meant was that she was "untouchable." No one was supposed to touch her as long as the bleeding continued. Her condition prevented her from getting married. She was not even allowed to go into the temple for worship.

Mark tells us that "she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse." So, here she comes, impoverished, an outcast, almost without hope.

This is the woman who came to Jesus. There she is in the crush of the crowd. She can't cry out about her condition to get Jesus' attention. The crowd would push her off to the side. She can't BE touched, but maybe she could reach out and touch him. Maybe he wouldn't even notice.

But He did notice. He felt a power surge that flowed out of his body when her faith-filled fingers touched his hem. Jesus turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" The woman was mortified. However, knowing what had happened to her, she came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

We can feel for her, can't we? Her condition was humiliating, and socially isolating. Now there was no more hiding. Why couldn't Jesus just keep her healing private? Why couldn't he allow her to keep at least a shred of her dignity?

It was because the community had shunned her due to her condition that made it necessary to call her out. The community needed to know that she was now free from that condition. Confession is not only good for the soul; it helps us to be restored to our rightful place in the community when we've been healed. Jesus gave her the opportunity to come forward and to truly be set free to be a part of the community which her illness had caused her to be cut off from.

He speaks to her. "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (This is the only time recorded in the Scriptures that he ever used this term "daughter.") Be freed from your suffering. Be freed physically. Be freed socially. Be freed spiritually.

There may be some of you here this morning who are feeling hopeless about some situation in your life. Maybe you've kept it a secret from your family, even your closest friends, but Jesus knows. Maybe it has to do with your health, or your relationships or your job. Maybe there is a situation in your family or friends that needs healing. Maybe you are concerned about you! Maybe your business is failing and you are at your wit's end to know how to reverse your financial slide. Maybe there is a secret sin that has you in its grip. You think to yourself, if

only there was something I could do. If I could touch even the hem of his garment, I would be set free.

First of all, Jesus knows about your concern. He knows your situation.

The second thing I want to point out is that it is very difficult to carry a heavy burden alone. Is there a trusted friend or counselor with whom you can talk? Is there someone who will not break your confidence? Is there someone who will listen sympathetically without judging? Jesus knows about your situation, but sometimes it helps to share it with at least one other person-- to have another human being to whom we can unload our troubles.

Pain and suffering come to all of us. The Good news is that we can be supported in those difficult times by the touch of one another's lives. The knowledge that we are not alone; that there is someone who is willing to touch us, hold us, keeps us from being destroyed.

Some situations call for us to take our problems to trained professionals. We're especially grateful to live in a time when medical science can do so much for us. And many people have been helped by marriage counselors and credit counselors and addiction programs and all the resources that are in our community to help those who are in distress. When the doctors tell you there is nothing more they can do, there is still one to whom we can reach out in faith.

The third thing I want say is to challenge us to do is to reach out to others. Sure we can reach out to Jesus for our own healing and reach out to others to share our burdens and experience healing and support, but we are also called to be agents of healing for others. We are called .to take Jesus to those who, don't have the strength to reach out for themselves.

When the Menninger Institute was still located in Topeka, Kansas, (before it became the Menninger Clinic and before it moved to Houston to become a part of Baylor College of Medicine,) it conducted a fascinating experiment. They identified a group of crib babies who did not cry. The fact is, babies cry because they instinctively know that this is the way to get attention. Crying is their way of calling out. (I saw this week that someone has developed an application for Smart Phones that can interpret a baby's cry and let parents know if it's a cry for attention, a cry of pain or a cry for a diaper change.)

These babies, however, had been in abusive situations. Their parents had let them cry for hours on end and never responded. Do you know what happened? The babies eventually quit crying. They had learned that it was not worth trying.

So the Menninger Institute got some people from retirement homes, and every day these people held these babies and rocked them. The object was to get

these babies to start crying again. And you know what? It worked. Physical touch had made the difference.

On my church calendar that I get each year from our denomination this Sunday is designated as Immigration Sunday. I can't help but think of the over 2,000 children who have been separated from their mothers that has sent some of them as far away as New York City. I wonder if they will one day have to have residents from retirement homes to have to come and rock them so they can again learn to cry.

One of the things I believe we value in this church is the power of touch. We want everyone who comes in our doors to feel welcome. We want to be able to help people learn and relearn to cry. As important as physical touch is, there is another kind of touch that is even more important, and that is spiritual touch. It's that special touch that influences and impacts people's lives.

Of all the things that I saw in museums one of the stories that touched me spiritually was one I heard from a docent on a battlefield in Fredericksburg. It was at the battle of the Sunken Wall. The Confederate army had taken up a position on one side of a brick wall at the top of a hill. The Union Army wanted to take that wall and so it sent a regiment of 1,000 men up the hill. The Confederate Army mowed down the first 1,000. The General sent a second regiment and the same result happened. The General sent another regiment and continued until over 7,000 Union soldiers lay wounded or dying on that open field. Then one confederate soldier gathered as many canteens he could carry, filled them with water and crossed over the wall and began giving water to those who were crying out in the hot sun. At first the Union Soldiers shot at him, but when they realized what he was doing they began cheering him on. This is a statue memorializing his act of compassion. His name was Richard Rowland Kirkland and he was called the Angel of St. Marye's Heights. Richard Rowland Kirkland exhibited the power of touch.. **SHOW SLIDE**

The statue was created by the same artist that memorialized the landing on Iwo Jima in World War II. I saw a lot of statues in my journey. Like David lamenting the loss of King Saul and his closer than a brother Jonathan, statues lament how the mighty have fallen. Whether they remember generals on horseback or in one case a native of Richmond named Arthur Ashe who won on the court but lost his life to a disease of AIDS that at the time in many ways made him untouchable, we lament when heroes fall.

The hero we all look to for inspiration and courage of course is Jesus. He was one who fought with love, who stood in confrontation, who championed the cause of those who were shut out, who were oppressed, who were hungry, and who were in need of experiencing the power of touch.

This week Anne and I went to see, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" the documentary of the Rev. Fred McFeely Rogers, creator of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood. Yes, Fred Rogers' middle name was McFeely. **SHOW SLIDE**

His middle name was his mother's maiden name. He was named after his grandfather. Mr. Rogers was ordained in the Presbyterian Church to the television ministry to children. I didn't remember it, but my son shared that he watched it as a child. The movie documents how Mr. Rogers used his show to teach children how to be good neighbors to all people. When African Americans were not allowed to swim in the same swimming pools as Anglo Americans Mr. Rogers had an African American who was playing a policeman come and cool his feet in a wading pool with him. When Robert Kennedy was assassinated Mr. Rogers used his puppets to share what the word assassination meant. When tragedy struck on September 11, 2001 it was Mr. Rogers who was quoted telling children to look for the helpers. On this Immigration Sunday can we not only look for the helpers, but be helpers?

Anne and I are members of a movie group that gathers once a month for a meal to discuss the spiritual significance of movies that we agree to see. When we gathered to discuss Won't You Be My Neighbor? I took a book of Mr. Rogers' quotes that Cynthia Oliphant gave to me, The World According to Mr. Rogers. As a closing I thumbed through the book and read the first one that fell open. It was a perfect message for me. Another person said, "Let's all read one." One by one we passed around the book and each person read a quote from Mr. Rogers. Each one had a particular meaningful application to that person. We, a group of folks long out of our childhoods felt included in not only Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, but in the family of God. Even though Mr. Rogers died in 2003, his words still had the power of touch.

The movie ended with something that Mr. Rogers often did. The camera focused one by one on those who had been a part of the show and heard Mr. Roger's voice ask them to take a moment and think of a person who had touched them in their life. It was powerful to watch the faces of Mr. McFeely out of costume, and the Policeman and Lady Aberlin and the camera man and YoY o Ma pause, think and then share the name of the person who came to mind. I wonder. Could we do the same thing this morning? Please take a moment and think of a person who touched your life. I'll give us all 30 seconds to do that. If you feel comfortable doing so, would you share the name of the person who came to your mind with someone near you?

What a friend we have in Jesus. What a friend we can be because of Jesus. There are babies who have come into this world that need to relearn how to cry through the power of touch. There are teenagers who far too soon have been introduced to the hard knocks that life has in store for them, that need to experience the power of touch. Even us Grown Ups who have long been in this

world and been isolated by one condition or another on their way out of this world need to experience the power of touch.

Today there are those around our world who continue to reach out in faith and find healing. The humble are rising up and being told to go in peace, to be restored to their communities, to help restore their communities. May we have the courage to reach out and touch the Lord. May we even become agents of reaching out to people who have gathered themselves in Red and Blue “states of mind,” to reach across aisles to find the healing touch of forgiveness, renewal and reconciliation. May we regain the hope that if we cry someone will come with a canteen of cold water. May we live in such a way that people find themselves reaching out to us even though they MIGHT have to “wash hands after experiencing the power of touch”.

Let’s pray. Dear Lord, may we touch you in faith and receive the cure of our spiritual and physical maladies so that we may live at peace and in freedom from what troubles us. No matter how alone we may feel, because of your love we are not. Give us the power to touch others, and to allow ourselves to be touched by the community of faith you have drawn together here.

Lord we pray for those who mourn. You said, “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. We pray for those who have lost their lives tragically in the latest mass shooting at the Capital Gazette newspaper in Alexandria Virginia.

We pray for those threatened by fires raging in California and Colorado. We pray for those still without power in Puerto Rico. We pray for those devastated by volcanos in Hawaii. We pray for children crying for their mothers.

We pray for the unrest in our world that leads to tragic and untimely deaths. We pray for peace in our world where nations rise against nations, and it seems the only way to ward off more violence is to threaten even greater violence. We pray for our president and all the leaders who have such heavy responsibility in the face of these conditions. Give them wisdom and discernment as to how to proceed.

We give thanks for the strength others give us as their spirits support us and make us glad. When we are exhausted, it is they who lift us up; when we are bent low, they help us stand tall. Keep us from taking their concern for granted and from burdening them with our problems beyond what they can bear. Because they reach out to us, give us the strength to reach out to others in your name. Amen.