

**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

**June 28, 2009**

*The Twelve Year Old Life     Mark 5:21-43*

The people around him tried again and again to fence him in, to close the circle around him.

His family wanted him back in their homestead in Nazareth. His disciples would not allow children to approach him. The crowd around him told the poor and the blind in the gutters of the streets to forget about him; he had not come for them, they said.

He was not supposed to talk to women in the street, and definitely not with the one at a well in Samaria. The Pharisees and scribes wanted him to restrict himself to them, to the saintly and the legally pure. His disciples wanted him to remain with them upcountry, and when he told them he was going to Jerusalem, they all advised against it.

He always escaped those attempts. He told his family, not you but humanity is my family. He ordered his disciples to allow children to come to him. He stopped in the crowd and asked them to produce the poor and the blind, who were shouting for him. He talked with the women, even the one from Samaria at the well.

He sat down with sinners, and with whomever those others might have thought impure. He left the countryside and went to Jerusalem

That trying to close the circle was not only something that happened then and there around him. It happens with us when coming together in his name. We start to know each other and we make coffee and tea, a breakfast and dough nuts, for after the service, and if we are not very careful the circle closes around us, getting smaller and smaller, often too small for our young ones, who escape and leave.

He was not like that, he was not like that at all, he constantly fought against it.

Last week Jesus rebuked the storm and then he rebukes the disciples. He mentions their fear of the storm and their lack of faith. Now the disciples as they hang with Jesus are going to be permitted to see the faith Jesus wants in them, in action.

A man named Jairus seeks Jesus out on behalf of his 12 year old daughter. In Israel at that time she would be considered a young woman. The story of Jairus's 12 year old daughter is interrupted by another story that describes a woman who has been through a living hell for 12 years. In fact, the interruption reveals an important message to Jesus' disciples, Jairus, and the crowd. Jesus has already established that he is stronger than any demonic power, and now we witness a demonstration of Jesus' power over sickness and even death. In addition, Jesus banishes the artificial and callous categories of being ritually clean or unclean, meaning untouchable at the time of Mark.

In addition “Jairus” very name would be a clue of what is going to happen. Jairus means, he who will awaken or he who is enlightened. Jairus is a man of some stature and authority. As a synagogue president, he is its highest official in liturgy, ritual, and administration. (5:22-24)

Jairus may have a position of power in his community, but he is first a father desperate for his daughter. He approaches Jesus with a faith born of that grief and helplessness that come from facing a sickness that will most likely end in death. He falls at Jesus’ feet, a beggar in need. This is a public act of reverence that asserts his belief and hope in the power of Jesus over illness. He asks Jesus to visit his house to lay hands on his daughter.

As Jesus goes with Jairus the crowd that followed Jesus from the lakeshore presses around him. The interruption occurs in the middle of the crowd. This is a critical crossroad. The girl is dying and every moment counts. The interruption is caused by a desperate woman. Sickness and death reduce everyone, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, to a common humanity. It’s important to note that, like the young girl, this woman is unnamed.

(5:25-34)

The heart wrenching description of the woman’s condition is described in detail so that there is no mistaking how unclean she is. Religious laws were detailed and ruthless in their definition. Not only is she unclean, but her clothing, everything she touched, the furniture she sits on and of course, anyone who accidentally touches her. She is supposed to be quarantined. Similar to the man in the tombs, she couldn’t be more isolated or abandoned. And she has been abused by doctors who have taken all her money. Now totally impoverished, she has no where else to turn.

This woman, who has been ill for 12 years, has lost everything: money, her position in the community, companionship, comfort, dignity, a place to live. But she has heard about Jesus and feels if she can just get near him, even touch his clothing, she will be made well. It is a tremendous risk on her part and also puts Jesus in jeopardy, as a touch from her would defile him. With a great deal to risk she goes up behind Jesus and touches his cloak; this nameless woman has been bleeding for 12 years. She had the type of contagion that if anyone touched her knowingly or unknowingly, became impure and untouchable too.

Immediately the woman senses in her whole body that she is whole again. The woman and Jesus both know that power has been transferred in touching Jesus.

Touching is a decisive mark of Jesus’ interaction with people, and the fact that Jesus has chosen to touch the unclean is explosive in a society that controls by the power to decide who is to be touched and who is untouchable.

Jesus did not seem to care; he wanted the public to hear that she had touched him, because he knew what happened. He had felt that power going out of him, and he wanted to teach them a lesson, a lesson of widening one’s circle all the time.

Touching is an amazingly common feature of Mark's Gospel. Sometimes Jesus stretches out to touch people, on other occasions he takes them by the hand. What is amazing is that by touching the sick Jesus is taking on their status, that is, he becomes unclean. Or rather, he abolishes the whole demeaning practice. He refuses to accept that human misery and the human body processes of begetting and child-bearing, of being ill and dying, put one outside the circle of God's concern. What Jesus is saying so eloquently in his hands outstretched to touch and caress is that humanity's ailments do not incur divine anger, rather they incite divine compassion. He wanted the disciples to know that, he wants more than anything for us to know and trust that.

So she came forward in fear and trembling while everyone was making room and giving way, so as not to touch her, but he even said that her faith had healed her. He called her daughter, not only enlarging the circle, but assuring her she was part of his family

He admired her, an impure one, he praised her, a signed one, a sick one. They were amazed and scandalized, just as we would be amazed and scandalized, if he joined us, coming in with his friends, the children and the poor, the blind and the deaf, the crippled and the mute, breaking the circle, because of interest and his love not only for you and me, but for all of us.

(Mark 5:35-42) Jesus has lingered with the woman who touched him and before he has sent her off with his blessing, four messengers arrive with the news that sounds so final: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Master any further?" They almost seem embarrassed by Jairus' public display, And it is clear that they don't think this teacher has anything to say about the finality of death, which intrudes so rudely on everybody's life. But Jesus is not deterred by death or any other experience. His first concern is for Jairus who is grieving and despairing. His child has died while Jesus was engaged with someone unclean. Jesus turns to Jairus and says: "Do not fear, just believe." Where have we heard those words before? It was on a boat in the middle of a storm. First Jesus rebuked the storm, then he rebuked the disciples. "Are you still afraid? Don't you have any faith? Notice what he says to the father of the little girl who just died. "Don't fear, just believe!"

It seems that Jesus circle and family begins with the largest group of people with the greatest needs or the deepest misery. Jesus shows his disregard for the practices of the religious establishment, which were often marked by insensitivity to those broken in body and spirit. The stories alert us about Jesus forming a family, and a community, a church where Jew and Gentile, man and woman, rich and poor, young and old are one in Christ.

Those who are healed are desperate. Jairus will do anything for his child. The woman with the hemorrhage is so desperate that she will break accepted laws. Will we do the same for family? And not just our blood kinship or birth families, but for the family into which we were baptized, the family with whom we share bread and wine? Driven by

love, Jairus is willing to beg, to give up his reputation and risk derision. He will do anything for his daughter, and Jesus goes off with him. Would we do the same?

It is striking to note that both woman in these stories, these daughters, are newborns after 12 years and bear the marks of the family of Jesus. They are clothed in the garment of the resurrection and given right mind, body and soul. They are sent out in peace to proclaim the goodness of God. They know that fear is useless, only faith in Jesus is sound.

Jesus family, found in the margins, ignores society's fear of contagion and difference and insists that no one is unacceptable. These are the people Jesus seeks out to touch. Jesus gives new birth to them through compassion, inclusion, respect and mercy. These people remember the line from Isaiah, "I will hold your hand to make you firm." (Is 42:6) and practice what Jesus has taught them.

All are invited in; all are sons and daughters, welcome, touched grasped by the hand to dwell in peace, sharing food and astonishing the world. This is what the family is for, and only this, to share the merciful and life-giving power of God with others.

Joy in the Christ Life, David E. Hinck