



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Summer Sabbath Sermon Series - 2024

Proper 13 - 6th Sunday after Pentecost - June 30, 2024

Texts for the Sunday (Lamentations and Mark referenced):

Lamentations 3:22-33

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

"Reach Out & Touch Someone"

Written by Rev. Jonathan Stufft. Copyright 2024.

Mark 5:21-43

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." ²⁴So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child

was. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Sermon Text:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

(sing) Reach out and touch someone. That's the 1979 ad jingle that was meant to spur the use of AT&T's long distance service (for those of you who don't recall, that means you had to dial 1 first, then the area code and number, and that it was going to cost you by the minute, so you better have a good reason to be making that call... and whoever was paying the phone bill should probably know before you even consider making the call!)

Reach out and touch someone. What a great slogan for a phone company, right?! Tapping our desire to be in touch even when we can't physically be present with another person. And we all know so much about that desire after a worldwide pandemic and coming back from that. We have an absolute *need* to reach out and touch someone, even if that means on the phone. And aren't we so very lucky to have so many developing ways to reach out and touch someone... letters and cards, phone calls and text messages, Zoom meetings and video chats, the internet and social media... we have a plethora of ways to reach out and touch someone. But ultimately, what AT&T understood with their ad slogan, was that people desire being connected. Community. Presence. And as I am reminded in every meeting I have, we like to be together (and we really like to talk!)

But to reach out and touch someone means that we have to be available. We have to be present. There's nothing worse than a returned card or letter, an unreturned voicemail or text message, getting kicked out of a Zoom meeting or video chat, or a social media interaction turned sour. If someone is not available, we feel that twinge of lament, of disconnectedness, and of being somehow shut out, even if that was never the intention. Reaching out and touching someone means being present and available.

As we look at the gospel story today, we can see the story in two ways. One of those ways can be dangerous to our understanding of faith in God. The other way can strengthen the kin-dom of God. So, let's take a moment to look at the difference. How can this gospel story be dangerous to our understanding of faith? After all, isn't this a story about having faith? It is... sort of. We can easily read this story and say that this is a story of a healing within a healing. A place where Mark has done what

Mark does so well, cramming a ton of story into a small space. That it's a place that shows us the power of faith. After all, here's a prestigious ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, who stood by waiting for Jesus to return from his trip across the sea. He's a man of importance in the community, and his young, soon to be wedding age daughter, is on her deathbed. He is so confident in his faith in Jesus - in God - and the healing power of God through Jesus, that he hangs out waiting. We don't know how long. But he waits in faith. In the hope of healing. His daughter is sick, and likely considered unclean by the community. She's isolated, and unable to connect. She's dying alone. And Jairus has faith. Faith that Jesus can heal. *And* Jesus heals... even resurrects.

The woman in the crowd, is broke and destitute, having spent everything she has in hopes of finding answers. Not unlike folks today, who don't have adequate options for insurance, and must spend every penny to pay off debt for care that should be gifted to all of humanity. She's considered unclean by this issue she has - perhaps her blood doesn't clot, or she's got internal bleeding, or an ulcer. Whatever the case, she is broke and desperate... and faithful. Holding onto hope that simply being in the presence of Jesus can heal her. That the whisp of her hand brushing his clothes is enough. Just holding out hope for a brush of healing to stroke her life. She's isolated, and unable to connect. She's suffering alone. And she has faith. Faith that Jesus can heal. *And* Jesus heals by the power of connection.

And if we stop there, then we tell a story that can be dangerous to the kin-dom of God. That story says that if you have *enough* faith (and I might argue that faith is faith, and is not changeable or quantifiable, as it is a boundless gift), then God can heal you. Restore you. Give you what you ask for because it's what you want.

And that's dangerous. Because what does that say to the person whose lament is deep because a loved one is not healed? What does that say to the person whose child dies? Or whose spouse is killed as a result of injuries from a car accident? Are those not faithful people? Did they not wait with enough hope and faith by the shore? Did they not think with enough hope and faith that even a brief touch of Jesus could heal? Oh, they did! Yes! They did. And that's the danger if we only tell this sandwiched story of two healings as a story of faith. It becomes a faithful person's returned card or letter, an unreturned voicemail or text message, getting kicked out of a Zoom meeting or video chat, or a social media interaction turned sour. And that hurts. It destroys. And it's a dangerous message all around. It will destroy faith.

But there's a second way to tell this story. One that strengthens the kin-dom of God. One that would make AT&T proud. Reach out and touch someone. It's a way of telling this story in the way that Jesus tells every story. Not as an individual success story that meets the need of the person desperate enough, hopeful enough, or faithful enough. But rather, as a story of the kingdom. Of community. Of God's

kingdom come. Of always focusing on those the world deems unworthy, invisible, and untouchable.

And the story is this - God is always present and inviting you in. God is always present and inviting you in. And I don't mean that in a cheesy, feel good, cliché kind of way. I mean it in the sense of true community. Of kin-dom. Of the presence of Christ walking with us in our hopelessness and times where we feel we have lost all faith. In those broke and broken times when we think we have lost all hope. In those times of pain where a loved one has died too soon... and, let's face it, it's *always* too soon... for us. In the times when we feel that everyone has let us down and that no one could possibly understand how we feel. Those times. Real life times. And the importance of this story today is not that Jairus' daughter is healed and gets up and walks. The importance of this story today is not that there's "enough" faith that if we just reach out to Jesus, we can be made well. Yes, those things can happen.

But this story. The story that Mark tells today. This is a story of being RESTORED. INTO. COMMUNITY! Having our uncleanness - the lines the world draws, the barriers the world puts up, the ways the world excludes - washed clean. Made irrelevant to the judgment of the world. Broken down and washed away. So that... we may be restored to community. Kin-dom. Connectedness to the body of Christ. No lines. No barriers. No one excluding us as unclean. Just brought back in by reaching out and touching someone.

In some recent conversations I have been taken back by comments saying that Pastors don't visit people anymore. That it doesn't seem to be taught in seminary anymore. And while that may occasionally be true, I do think that most pastors understand the need to visit. That visiting is the healing work of the church in the world.

Reach out and touch someone. Connect. Be restored to the community. Be welcomed. In whatever state you are in. In whatever health you are in. In whatever frame of mind you are in. The healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage is certainly a physical healing.

But the story we need to hear is a story of *restoration*. That God *waits*. That God *listens*. That God is *always present* and *longing to restore us as community* - the body... of Christ. That, as imitators of Christ, we do the same. Wait. Listen. Always be present. Long to restore community by sharing the love of God.

Go ahead. Reach out and touch someone.

Amen.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).