

St. Mark Lutheran Church Service
October 3, 2021
“**Touch like the Master**”
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Readings

First Reading Genesis 1:24-28

“So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:28)

Psalm Psalm 8

“what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Ps 8:4-5)

Second Reading Heb 1:1-4; 2:5-12

“You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.” (Heb. 2:7-8).

Gospel Luke 8:40-53

“Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.” (Luke 8:47)

Grace to you, and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon in a Soundbite

From the opening of Genesis to the Gospels, Scripture reveals human beings to be unique creatures made in the image of God to reflect the glory of God. Each and every human person is precious to our Creator; from the womb to the grave. In a flawed and sin-scarred world, Jesus Christ commissions his followers to recognize the worth and restore the dignity of human beings. Beyond healing illness; Jesus redeems humanness, identity and affirms faith in our position to reflect his glory. The most incredible miracle of all is that he equips us to do likewise.

“Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace.” (Luke 8:48). **PRAY**

I. Introduction: “To love and serve the Lord”

“P: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. C: Thanks be to God.” Let’s not get too excited; it is not my intent to dismiss our service just yet. Instead, let’s pause to ask...how did we fulfill that commission this week? What shape did your love and service take? In what moments was this charge fulfilled? Better yet, who’s story, health, or life is now impacted by your touch?

Strange reasons are offered for going to church. The Church of the Cross United Methodist church put this invitation on their message board: “Don’t let worries kill you; let the church help.” Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church posted: “Do you know what hell is? Come hear our preacher.” St. Mary Catholic Church touted this quip: “Our Sundays are better than Dairy Queen.” You know the old comedian George Burns’ quote, “The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.”

It is easy to slip into the habit of thinking that we come into worship to refill our love tanks and refresh our souls. We come together to publicly confess our sins, recognize forgiveness through the shed blood of Christ, hear Scripture, listen to insights and motivation to apply its message, partake of the Lord’s supper and leave with benediction (blessing). The last act of worship is a commissioning, a send-off, a charge. It’s an authoritative command. Go in the peace that God has given you to do his will and his work in loving service to others.

There are Christian traditions that gather for worship each Lord’s day with the expectation that they come not to listen. They are ready to share how their walk with Christ went over the past week and how others were touched. The bringing of tithes and offerings is not merely about funding; but laying the fruit of all our labors before the Cross. Worship is not so much to hear an exhortation from a preacher or to sing a favorite hymn. It is to jointly inspire the body of Christ in our ongoing walk and work for the Lord. If our gathering today were to include speaking about recent service; consider what we would bring this day to share?

What moments of image of God- *imago Dei*- restoration, recognizing human worth and value, can we bring forward during the offertory?

II. Enter the Drama

Physician Luke provides the perfect image to inspire a ministry of touch to those who we too often choose not to see; those who suffer in silence and stigmatization.

This account in the Gospel is the perfect illustration of the theological foundation set forth in Genesis. This healing event puts a face to the words of the Psalmist

“what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Ps 8:4-5). and

This passage affirms a commission to believers to care for others in his name.

At this juncture in the Gospel narrative, the flow of the drama is intense. Jesus recently calmed stormy seas. The storm rages and dark waters threaten the lives of his disciples. Jesus is awakened in a boat, stands tall, and commands the fervor to cease...it gets quiet. *Jesus reveals his authority over nature.* Then, as Jesus and his disciples land on shore and begin to teach, Jesus is confronted by a Legion of Demons. These spirits of evil reside in a human being making him so powerful that no team of persons could control. The Gergesene demoniac could not be bound by chains or restrained by human force. Jesus did not set out to challenge those demons. Instead, they taunt him. So, Jesus casts them into a herd of pigs and who, in turn, run into the sea. *Jesus reveals his power over the forces of darkness and evil.* Word spreads about this new Rabbi and his remarkable authority. Is Jesus the Messiah? More and more people come to see.

The passage takes readers into the fray over the popularity of Jesus. The crowds are unbearable. Jesus is in great demand. The cries for him to heal become deafening. From within the crowd, a celebrity emerges- Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. This person of power speaks out to plea for Jesus to alter course to heal his daughter. Jesus agrees to come to prevent the tragic loss that is about to destroy this community leader. The central point of this story will be the miracle of raising Jairus' 12-year old daughter from the dead. The age of this girl is not a random detail. At 12, a female child enters womanhood. She is developmentally and culturally ready to show her personhood in her own right. Will death deny her the opportunity to display her identity and live her life? The Messiah reveals himself by bringing her back from the world beyond. *Jesus has authority over life and death.*

Our attention will now move to the side story of the woman who suffered from blood flow for 12 years. Luke does want us to connect that she has suffered for as long as the main person in the story has lived. What makes her story so important that it interrupts the flow its climax in Jesus raising the young women from death?

The Theological Message

It is always useful to pause over the familiar words from the Creation account regarding the pinnacle of the chaos to order event: the raising up of human beings. This creature is made in God's image. Human beings are brought forth to steward creation and represent the one who brought all matter and living beings into existence.

So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The features, characteristics, and creative abilities of human beings are so godlike, it is easy to become confused and slip into the sin that our image bearing qualities give us permission to shape ourselves, set rules we prefer, and place our interests at the center of the drama. Adam and Eve partake the forbidden fruit that gives them awareness of good and evil. They naively seek to occupy the central role reserved for the Creator they represent; as if their unique abilities were theirs to assert and not a gift to steward.

Human beings continue to act out the pattern of distorting the order of creation by bending it to conform to our will. Sinful selfishness divides families, cultures, nations, and the global community. Scripture calls Christ followers to return to our status as living representatives of the Almighty Creator. Our service is to speak and act to honor him. This ministry can restore order to the chaos that surrounds us.

III. The Blessing

In our Gospel passage, two women are restored to fullness of life. In the culture of the day, women were not granted the rights and privileges afforded to men. The interruption in the story line brings to mind two points.

1) Jesus reinforces in his ministry and action the theological reality that gendered human beings- male and female- are made in the image of God. There is no gender preference in God's vision. *Jesus overrides the gender disparities of the day.*

Jesus stops his journey to acknowledge a healing that happens completely out of the limelight and in complete secret. Our focus will now turn to a dejected woman who is exhausted from years of endless bleeding. If the disease is not enough, she suffered through useless, expensive and ineffective medical treatment. There is

nothing left of her and her place in society has disappeared. She is invisible. It is her desperation for wholeness that connects her with Jesus.

2) This tormented sufferer plots in silence to get near and touch Jesus' robe; actually, his tassel. She moves with stealth to avoid notice. Her life was interrupted, not merely by the horror of a chronic disease, but from the scorn of the community. She endures a chronic illness and lives in the chronic state of being perpetually unclean. The laws from Leviticus (Lev 15: 25-30) do set her predicament as impure and unclean. Yet, the health prescriptions of law do not fully account for her social rejection and being forced into the role of an outcast. This trauma of social rejection arises beyond the purity laws and lies in the norms established in the Jewish practices of the day. The result is that this woman lives under the burden of isolation. Her days are lived under the pressure of constant bullying and community shame.

The instant the healing happens, Jesus stops the action. Jesus acknowledges that he is the healing agent. "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." The healing force flows from him without effort or fanfare. Jesus makes a fuss to reveal the face of this redeemed sufferer. What is the reason to draw attention to this quiet and unseen miracle?

There is a lesson to learn beyond the medical event. Remember the players on stage at the moment. There is the curious crowd assessing this Rabbi as potential Messiah. Jairus and his entourage are in tow, impatient to put Jesus in contact with his only child. The disciples are dizzy with this immersion into public notoriety. No doubt there are Roman soldiers who pick up on Jesus' increasing fame and lurk around the edges to monitor the political movements of the mob. And of course, we are there, transported into the moment via Luke and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus stops the progression towards demonstration of his power over death to display the importance of care for one of the least of these. In the crowd is a human being with worth, cast aside because of a medical malady. Jesus gives a lesson to sharpen our vision to fully see those who are cast aside and treated as if a single human life has no worth; as if one's medical status could reduce personhood and human dignity to nothingness.

When left without any choice, the woman comes forward to confess her 'offense' and 'offensiveness' to the Master. It is so important to consider the tension of that moment and the drama playing out. Her story must have taken several minutes to explain and retell. Did she go back to her first days of discovery when she came to

grips with the reality that she was unclean? Might she have recounted tales from the inept medical charlatans who charged her account as they pretended to cure her? The invisible woman has a moment in the spotlight to pour out her plight. Her shame over the unrelenting discharge from her body and the struggle that comes from becoming a less than human creature who is of no value or consequence. The confession echoes her hurt and hopelessness.

Ponder the significance of this encounter. She is already physically healed. Jairus, the expect celebrity must be placed on hold and has to stand near a woman who makes him unfit to enter the temple. The crowd is aghast that this impure animal is exposing them all to impurity. It is this moment that Jesus seizes to take restoration to a whole new level. Beyond healing her illness; her human identity and worth is redeemed. He affirms her as his words touch her deepest trauma; the stigmatization that she lives as a person who no longer has any place, purpose or right to engage in the realm of the living. The touch of the master not only cleanses her body; his blessing restores her status to be known and reside in community. *“Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace.”* (Luke 8:48).

Jesus, the God-Human being, affirms the truth that this woman, however tainted, continues to be a beloved image bearer.

IV. Application: Touch like the Master

Take this lesson home. In the midst of all the crowds, chaos, confusion, chasing after the latest sensation and basking in the light of celebrities, don't miss seeing those who suffer from isolation, loneliness, and fear. The living conditions may differ in our day but there are so many who find themselves on the margins and outside genuine community. *The Gospel lesson for today is this: be a Christ follower who serves the master by creatively offering the touch of blessing and affirmation.* Notice human beings, made in his image, who no longer have a way to shine for his glory for they have no place, purpose or sense of personhood. This is how we make our master proud.

V. The tale of Brother Louis

Many years ago, I had a moment of ministry where the reality of this message was driven home. My role at the time was as a psychologist intern in a child welfare agency. This home for delinquent boys was a religious shelter for rebellious teenagers who no one else wanted or could manage. The leaders were LaSalle Brothers. My intern position in the residential school put me in occasional contact

with the long-term principal, Brother Louis. This whitehaired headmaster was small in stature. Nevertheless, I had seen him on more than one occasion go face-to-face with angry, urban gangbangers who were threatening to do harm. Brother Louis never appeared afraid; nor did he back down from a hostile encounter. He was a force to reckon with in a school where the pupils were nothing but rejects. The teachers, social workers and staff under his direction knew better than to see Louis' boys as anything less than special and full of dignity. His charges may be labeled as incorrigible, antisocial, dangerous, and worthless. Brother Louis took no guff. He affirmed the worth, dignity, and value of every throwaway adolescent.

Towards the end of my time at LaSalle, I had a private encounter with Brother Louis in a chance hallway meeting. The news had leaked that Brother Louis would step aside at the end of the school year. I understood that this headmaster was beyond retirement age and the rumors suggested that his health was not stable. As Brother Louis greeted me, he stopped to talk. This was rare. My polite query came out "what's next for you Brother Louis?" We spoke for several minutes. He set aside his agenda, and shared with me in a sunny hallway. The conversation remains vivid in my memory. I had never heard Brother Louis step out of his headmaster role or share with such a tender voice. He had not been assigned new duties. LaSallian Brothers do not make their own choices; they go where they are placed by the Order. His skin was a touch pale, his breathing a bit labored; but his eyes were full of passion and vitality.

Brother Louis took the time to explain that he was pleading to be reassigned and not put out to pasture. He did not wish to fade into obscurity when there is so much more ministry to do. He felt a deep calling to take charge of a small work in a third world country: a residential home for pregnant women diagnosed with Aides. Those infants are not adoptable and enter the world as unwelcome mouths to feed. Brother Louis saw a vital community reaching these rejects from society; affirming the mothers and babies who no one wanted. This was the ministry that he sought to lead with his remaining days. What better way to serve the Master than to touch those who no one else wanted to touch. His life, whatever days he was given to live, could be usefully given to affirm those that no one else wished to affirm.

Brother Louis was a powerful leader and skillful administrator. Like Jesus, he was able to stop dead in his tracks, in the midst of a critical ministry appointment, to connect with a woman who was broken, isolated, without resources and tragically without hope. Brother Louis did not know me and he had no reason to be open about the desire of his heart. This conversation and sharing flowed as a gracious gift. He modeled his way of listening to the Lord. The openness of his ears to hear

pleas, affirm identity and bestow human dignity to those who no longer have a place. He longed to touch others the way that Jesus did; and send them away with the benediction of shalom.

In a few moments, I will close our worship with the words, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” The Gospel lesson today gives meaning to that going and serving.

Let our homes, our contacts with neighbors, conversations in our workplaces and Zoom meetings become opportunities to touch others like our Lord touches the trauma and lostness of this woman by welcoming her into his presence and sending her off with the hope of peace.

VI. Pray

Lord Jesus, you see the oppressed, bleeding and abandoned and model this vision. Open our minds and use our voices to openly and willingly *affirm the value and worth of both men and woman*, those of our birth gender and those with the other.

Holy Spirit, guide our hearts to love with love *consistent with kingdom values*.

Heavenly Father pour out your remedy. Relieve the scars from rejection let *our acts of kindness soothe others with the blessing of community embrace*.