

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and 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.' So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages 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 clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her hemorrhage 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 clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round 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.'

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?' But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

"Because I Knew You"

Rev. Pam Everhart

June 28, 2009

Bishop Brown, who was our bishop at the time, washed the ordinands' feet as a part of the ordination service. I sat back in the seats and watched them on the big screen last year and I was appalled. Not necessarily by Joel's big old foot - it was big on the screen - but just because I didn't really want that to happen to me. All year I've worried that the bishop would wash my feet at ordination, and I don't really want the bishop touching my feet. I don't really want anybody touching my feet. Holding my foot up on a big screen? I worried about that for a whole year. I mentioned this fact during my speech to the clergy session last week. We have to speak before all of the clergy at Annual Conference, those of us who are trying to be ordained, and then after our speech, they decide whether or not to vote us in. That sounds scary, doesn't it? Well, I decided to let them know of this foot

thing that I have, phobia, foot phobia, so I told them about the possibility of someone touching my feet, my paranoia over the bishop possibly washing my feet a couple days after this, and the bishop leaned into the mike and said that she could do a special foot-washing just for me, if I wanted that. I convinced the bishop that she did really not want to see my mean and nasty side, and the clergy session voted me in anyway.

It's ironic to me that this sermon is about touch, because if you know me, you might know that I'm not a touchy-feely kind of person, I'm not a big hugger. I'm a little stand-offish. In fact, Chuck likes to tell people that I'm the congregational care pastor who doesn't want people around her that much. You kept me anyway. So it's interesting that when I read this story that I've read many times before, over the years, and heard many sermons on, that when I read it this time, the parts of it that leapt off the page at me were the parts about touch. Touch and how important it is in the lives of the people in the text. In this story, touch makes a difference that I see in three ways. It empowers and it changes and it connects. And I'm not just talking about literal touch, although that is a great big part of this story, but also the figurative touch, the way each life intersects with another and how that makes a profound difference on the world. In this passage, a synagogue leader named Jairus digs through the crowd to get to Jesus, pleading with him to come and heal his daughter. The laying on of hands is important to him. He says, "Come and lay hands on my daughter, so that she may be made well and live." It fills people that touch with the power to resurrect, the power to renew. Touch does empower people. It empowers us. Just after this plea from Jairus, a woman with a debilitating hemorrhage comes up to Jesus, and she reaches out for his clothes. The Scripture says that she says, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." She knew her life could change with one touch. Touch does change people. And Jesus, look what happens to him in this story. Even though the woman is behind him, and probably just grabs a little piece of his garment, he feels her touch. He knows someone has connected to him. That touch she makes to him connects him to her. Touch does connect us together.

Talk for a minute about touch empowering us. "Come and lay hands on her." That's what the father says to Jesus. He has faith that Jesus, in that action, can resurrect his daughter. Jesus doesn't wave a magic wand over this little girl. He touches her hand with his hand. All he does is touch her, and in that moment, she's resurrected. She's empowered to have a new life and see things a new way.

Another thing that happened at Annual Conference this year was, during one of the worship services. We always honor the retirees, the people who are retiring from full-time ministry. We always have a part of the service where those who are getting ready to be ordained have to answer what are called the traditional Wesley questions. It's questions that John Wesley asked of people he was ordaining, years ago, and they're still asked of us today. Both of those things always happen at Annual Conference. Well, they put them together in one worship service, so we honored the retirees, and then the ordinands came up on the stage and they asked us all questions that John Wesley asked, and we answered them, and then as a part of this whole structure, the youth were leading the service. They were reading liturgies and prayer and Scripture and so on, so the youth and young people were basically in charge of the service itself. As sort of a final blessing

of this worship service, the retirees laid hands on the new ordination class. So we knelt on the stage and the retirees stood behind us and laid their hands on us, and then in turn, we laid our hands on the young people who were there, showing the connection between the generations, how we connect to one another, how the way we touch each other sends power and energy from one generation to the next. It was an amazing experience. It was one of the best parts of Annual Conference for me, and I think for the people who saw it too, not just the people involved in the actual service, but people who were in the audience. People started sending text messages on Twitter and Facebook, and so in a matter of minutes this was around the globe, almost, and we started getting messages back about a wonderful profound statement that was that our conference had made, to put retirees and ordinands and young people, the passing of the mantle. So I was proud to be a part of that, and it really was a big part of my experience last week.

Another thing that changed me was the ordination itself. David said he thinks I've changed the way I feel about touch, just based on the ordination. He thinks he knows why, because I showed him, showed everybody, how the bishop ordained me. I'll show you what I showed David. This is what she did. Isn't that cool? She put her hands all over my head, you can go sit down now, thank you. I think something about that moment did change me, the laying on of hands. The giving of the mantle. It resurrected me with a yearning to be in ministry that sometimes even those of us who haven't been in it very long let fade away a little. It was a moment filled with power. I did feel empowered. I did feel renewed. Touch is a way to empower people.

Another thing touch does is, it changes people. In the Broadway musical *Wicked*, there are two main characters, and they're natural enemies. One is the weird and different girl who's green, and her name is Elphaba, she becomes the wicked witch of the West. The other is a lovely blonde and beautiful girl named Glinda who becomes the good witch of the East. These two girls are thrown together in boarding school and though they're very different, they end up becoming friends. One of the best songs from the musical is the "Song for Good." It's a song the two girls sing to one another about how they were thrown together by circumstances of time and place, and though they did not like each other in the beginning at all, they know now, as their relationship has evolved, that they have been changed by one another for good. The way their lives intersect, the way they end up connecting with each other despite their differences, the changes in their lives are for good.

Elphaba has been shunned for years. She's not been touched, she's not been loved, because she's different. She's green. She's not unlike the woman in the story today. She'd been not touched, and shunned, because of her medical condition. In the musical, Elphaba's connection to people changes her sense of who she is and what she can be in the world. Being touched in a positive way, being appreciated, being loved, it changes people. And this is how Elphaba describes it in a part of that "Song for Good." "I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn, and we are led to those who help us most to grow, if we let them, and we help them in return. Well, I don't know if I believe that's true, but I know I'm who I am today because I

knew you. Who can say if I've been changed for the better, but because I knew you, I have been changed for good."

The woman with the hemorrhage knows the power of touch, too. She has been shunned. She knows that she needs someone to help her, and she knows that she can be touched, with just a single touch her life can change. The active seeking out that she does, reaching out for Jesus, creates change in her life. And in Jesus' life. Our active reaching out and touching one another changes our lives, and it changes the lives of those around us.

In the song you heard fish sing earlier, "Gospel Changes," the writer tells us the story of the Gospel appears over and over again, in somewhat repeating patterns. The prodigal son, he changes his ways, talks about some people worshipping the golden calf, others being bought and sold, Jesus all the while trying to show us how to really live our lives. What this song suggests is that the old story had new names and new faces, but the story is still the same. We're on a journey, and we always have the opportunity to change. Usually, that opportunity comes through touching someone else's life.

As I said earlier, Jesus does feel that woman's touch, an instant connection is made. He turns around and says, "Who touched he?" The disciples can't believe he even asked such a question. There must have been a thousand people touching him. He wants to know who made that connection in desperation to him. We are connected to one another when we reach out and touch one another in acts of love. Both parties feel the impact of a touch given.

Do you remember that old childhood game, Red Rover? I never liked that game, because I could never break through the people's linked arms. I have a lot of baggage about that, too. I always got stopped by their linked arms. Always. I don't think I ever, one time, broke through. And of course, the goal is to break through the arms and run, run, into the distance. I started thinking about that this week, and I thought you know, this might not exactly be the best message to send. If we really are to be winners, we would be glad we were stopped by arms being linked, and we would join in with the link. We would create a larger connection, an added connection to their already-formed one.

Lately I've been thinking about the way each of you have touched my life, and how you have helped to mold me and shape me into who I am today. There are those here who have challenged me, and that has empowered me to take authority and claim it and stand on it as a minister of God. If we have disagreed, or if we have agreed, it has made me stronger, because I had to listen to you. I had to figure out why I disagreed with you, or why I agreed with you, and whether or not that was valid, and then take my own stand. Those who have shared classes and support groups and circle meetings and committee meetings and coffee shop conversations and so on, all of you have helped me to connect to the world around me. Your special touch, and all of you have one, in whatever capacity, has enabled me to see connections I never knew existed before, and to connect old ways with new, and old people with new. I have learned to pull all of you into the same boat, and to connect you with the other boats that are sailing on the same sea. Those who have been with me through all of the good and bad times here have changed me. I'm

really not the same person I was when I arrived here two years ago. I think I'm stronger, more determined, and hopefully, I'm a better minister than I was in 2007. I do owe all of my successes to you and what you have meant to me, and I shoulder any of the failures as my own. I have truly been changed for good, because I have been among you for the last two years. This is a great church. You heard in the announcements this morning all the wonderful things we're doing. Who wouldn't want to be a part of this church? The people here are strong and supportive and courageous and abundantly generous. Thank you for the ways you have touched me. Because I knew you, because I knew you, I have been touched and empowered and changed for good.

But what do we do now? How do we go to the next step? You know who your next step is going to be with. You have your new pastor named. It doesn't mean that our legacy together is over. What is the legacy we leave of our time together? I think it might be that I continue, and you continue, though not together, that we continue reaching out for connection to the world around us, that we continue striving to empower and change the world. In this story today, there is a desperate father who is seeking healing for his daughter, and there is a desperate woman who is seeking healing for herself. I urge you to have that same sense of urgency, that same desire to reach out for Jesus and seek empowerment and connection and change. I encourage you to look for all the ways you can continue to reach out to those beyond our walls. Find a way to empower and change and connect the world to what you have right here, and as you do, may God walk with you. Amen.