

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Text: Mark 5:21-43  
Preacher: Vicar Stephanie Kershner

St. Peter's-Lafayette Hill, PA  
June 28, 2009

### “Touch and be Touched”

My best friend Kim has colitis. She found this out our first year in seminary. Colitis is an awful disease. It causes horrible stomach pains and bleeding when going to the bathroom. Whatever Kim ate would make her sick. Within minutes of finishing a meal she would have to run to the bathroom. This constant need to be close to a bathroom and the continuous pain that wracked her body limited what she could do and where she could go. She was unable to attend classes. She was unable to work. She was unable to live a normal life.

Her symptoms got so bad during the later part of the year that she went home to Long Island for two weeks to stay with her parents. During those two weeks she went to numerous doctors, had extensive testing done, and was put on a number of medications. However none of these things eased Kim's pain and suffering.

One afternoon her mother asked her if she would go to the grocery store with her. Kim agreed. They drove through town and Kim began to notice that they were not going the regular route to the grocery store. She asked her mother about this. Her mother told her that they were going to go somewhere else first. A few minutes later they pulled into the driveway of a house. A house that Kim did not know and had never been to before. Kim's mom told her not to be mad but that she had brought her to a faith healer. Kim actually was not upset with her mother at all. She got out of the car and went into the woman's house. The healer had Kim lay down on a mat and she proceeded to put her hands on Kim's stomach. She did some chanting, said some prayers for comfort and healing and then sent Kim back to the car. Kim was not instantly healed by the touch of this woman. In fact it has taken quite some time for doctors to find the right balance of medication and diet to help Kim live a somewhat normal life free of constant pain.

My friend was desperate to be healed. Much like the woman in the crowd that day. This woman had been bleeding for twelve years. Twelve years! She had been to many doctors but her condition just got worse and worse. She continued to suffer. She continued to bleed.

Jewish laws strictly forbid her to be in contact with other people. If someone were to touch her, or her clothing, or the bed she slept in, or even the seat she sat in they would be labeled unclean just as she was. Unclean. She could not attend services at the temple, she could not have visitors over, she was cast out. Isolated. Ostracized. Twelve years of this. She was unable to live a normal life for twelve years.

This woman was desperate. She was willing to risk everything to be in the crowd that day including her life. Just to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Just a little touch and she knew, she truly believed that she would be healed. And she was! Jesus' whole being was filled with the awesome divine power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit. Unlike faith healers of long ago and of present day, Jesus' divinity was and is certain. This

woman who had been tormented by illness for twelve years was made whole through a brief and gentle touch of the divine. A touch that was entirely initiated by her. She reached out knowing deep within her own soul that she would be healed by contact with Jesus.

But her story does not end there. She was not able to disappear into the crowd. She was not able to run off without being noticed. Jesus felt her touch. He felt his healing power leave his body. Even though he was surrounded on all sides and felt people pushing and grabbing at him he felt this woman's desperate touch for healing. Instead of letting the woman remain anonymous he stopped, and asked "Who touched my clothes?" The woman who had been healed fell down before him trembling in fear. The crowd surrounding her could kill her! She confessed she was the one who touched his garment, confessed her illness, confessed that she had been unclean, confessed that she had risked making the whole crowd unclean in order to be healed, confessed her faith in the healing power of Jesus. Jesus comforted her, even called her "daughter", and sent her away with a blessing of peace.

A few years ago I was riding the subway to work in the morning. It was after nine o'clock so the subway cars were not very crowded. Everyone had plenty of room. A man got on a few stops after I did. Instead of taking a seat he leaned with his back against one of the poles in the middle of the aisle. His briefcase was placed between his feet. He took out the New York Times and began to read. This man looked so familiar to me and yet I couldn't place him to save my life. A stop or two later a woman got on just in time before the doors closed. The cars began to move on to the next stop. This woman was jarred by the movement. Her arms flew out reaching for something to stabilize her so she wouldn't fall to the floor. She grabbed onto the pole the man was leaning against and touched the man's back. All of a sudden the man began shouting: "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" The woman apologized profusely and moved to the opposite end of the car. At the next stop a few teenagers got on and one of them bumped into the man by accident. "I said don't touch me! Don't touch me!" The teenager apologized and stepped away from the man. The man picked up his briefcase with a huff, stuck his newspaper under his arm, and proceeded to shove through the group of teenagers to the door. When the train came to a stop he marched out the door. A couple of months later I saw this man again. In church. He was the organist for the United Church of Christ congregation that shared the building with the Lutheran church I attended.

Jesus not only allowed himself to be touched but took the time to respond to the woman's touch. Even though he was hurrying to the house of Jairus, one of the temple officials, to heal his daughter, Jesus stopped. By stopping to recognize the woman in the crowd that day Jesus taught us to respond to those who reach out and touch us when they are in need of healing and comfort.

Often we ignore the little touches of those in need around us. We are too busy, we hurry on to something we consider much more important. But there are people all around us who are reaching out in faith to touch the hem of our garments. People who are lonely and just need someone to chat with them for an hour. People who are struggling with debilitating diseases that have destroyed their own spirit and only ask that someone prays

for them because they themselves are just too tired. People who have had a bad day and simply need a smile from a friend.

If you are in need, find the courage and strength in your soul to reach out, touch the hem of the garment. Find comfort. Find wholeness. Find healing.

If you are touched, acknowledge the pain, the suffering, and the hope in that touch. Give them comfort, give them wholeness, give them healing. Amen.