

GOD'S TOUCH

Nicky Ing - 29th June 2003

Psalm 24; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5: 21-43

In the Gospel passage we have just read, Mark uses a technique of placing one story within another. The story of Jairus and his young daughter at the point of death is begun, but before it has ended, a second story is told of an unnamed woman in the crowd whom Jesus heals of her sickness. In this way the two events are linked and we are invited to read one in the light of the other. Both stories are of cures that no human power could work. In different ways they each reveal the greatness of the power that is made present to people in Jesus, a power so divine yet so available to people with faith in God. In both these stories, someone is given new life by contact with Jesus. The older woman touches Jesus, the younger woman is touched **by** Jesus. Where human efforts have failed, Jesus brings new life.... A sure sign that God's power is being revealed through him. Both of these events are examples of faith and trust in God....in one case bringing about the healing of self....in the other, restoring someone to life.....both of those healed are women, one an outcast because of her complaint, and one a young girl. Jesus is working his miracles as responses to faith among the weak and rejected. We notice, from this passage, that Jesus healed sick people by touching them. He touched people in various ways.....with his words, with his hands, with his love. In therapy and healing the problem is always the whole person, not just the symptom alone.....Jesus never just cured an illness; he cured a sick **person**. His words healed the spirit; His touch healed the body.

More than almost anything else, human touch gets its meaning from its context. Children soon learn from their parents the unique language of touch. Medical research has shown that if a newborn child does not experience loving human touch frequently, the baby will not thrive...in fact, a tiny child completely deprived of touching may eventually die. Rough handling in a cruel and unloving environment will in turn do harm to the child's emotional development. Touch plays a crucial role in early communication. And for older people, verbal communication is as important as physical touch is to an infant. There are many ways in which we can experience thatfor those of us who find it difficult to write letters.....modern technology has made it possible for us to keep up long-distance communication....the radio, TV, the telephone, more recently the email via the Internet.... The cellphone and the wonders of SMS (which I am only just beginning to discover!) all help us to 'stay in touch' with one another. 'In' or 'out' of touch can spell the difference between keeping and losing a friendship. We all **need** to communicate, to feel that we belong, and that we matter to other people, and most of all, to God. If we think about this it can help us to appreciate the healing and restoration of life stories that we meet in the Gospel this morning.....

Take Jairus... a leader of the local synagogue.....and therefore a man who is well known in the local community. It is a major thing for him to come forward, fall on his knees, and plead for Jesus to come and lay hands on his dying 12 year old daughter '*so that she may be made well, and live*'. His love for his daughter and his trust in Jesus' touch are powerful. And then along comes a woman with an internal hemorrhage problem that has lasted as long as Jairus' daughter is old...**12 years**.....her problems are so many. Not only is she financially ruined from the cost of ineffective medical treatments, not only has she suffered a great deal at the hands of many doctors...but she lives in a culture where her condition makes her permanently 'unclean'. She is a social leper, an outcast. Even by going through the crowd, she is making everyone else unclean, including Jesus when she reaches out just to touch his garment, **believing** that this will give her the healing she desperately needs. Then Jesus knowing power has gone out from him, turns to see who it is that has touched him...she comes before him ashamed and fearful, but meets only kindness and love, and is sent on her way fully healed, and filled with peace. Jesus shows that the touch she needed was not just the physical contact with his clothing but the faith with which she approached him. Meanwhile, when people come from Jairus' house to tell him that his daughter has already died, Jesus invites Jairus to an even deeper faith. He has already seen the healing of the woman and her faith...now he is invited to believe that Jesus' touch can overcome death itself...and indeed it happens. These stories also reflect our life of Christian faith. We find the healing touch and the raising power of God by means of our faith, our trust in Jesus, the Risen Lord. Jesus' words '*Your faith has made you well*' and '*do not fear, only believe*' are meant to touch us as well, and to enable us to reach out and touch others in a healing way with the love of Jesus.

Our lives constantly touch those of others, and we are affected by the way other people respond to us. Like the woman who approached Jesus for healing, we can suffer from many inner wounds. Often our distress is psychological.....we are depressed, anxious, fearful or angry. Perhaps we feel a sense of rejection, failure or worthlessness. Maybe we are lonely, or bitter and hostile towards others whom we consider to be more fortunate than ourselves. In so many different ways, we all need inner healing, and we need to be continually aware of our own vulnerability, just as Jesus was. In thinking about all this and the way our lives touch those of others, I asked myself...what kind of touch do I offer to others, what goes out from **me**, through my words, my deeds, my relationships? Do I sometimes hurt people by the ways that my life touches them? Or do I bring healing? With a little more understanding, could I have helped to heal a wounded heart this week? Or with a little more care, could I have calmed an anxious mind? If I had offered a little more time, perhaps I could have eased the pain of someone's loneliness. How much do I trust in the power of Jesus to heal **me**...and to use me, and do I accept that through prayer and deepening my relationship with God, my own attitudes

towards other people can be transformed? It is an ongoing process of conversion that needs to happen in me, shaping me, moulding me, making me more aware of God's love....and the more I become aware of that love, so much the more can I trust in it.....even in the presence of pain, disappointment, loss...death.

There are some who might suggest, on reading this passage from Mark's Gospel...that if you have enough faith (whatever that means)....like Jairus, then your child will not die.... Or **you** will not die... or others you love and care about will not die (or will not stay dead!) or at least not at the moment, or not for a long time. Some might say that life is a kind of contest... where everything depends on **you**...or whether you have the 'right' kind of faith to win the prize of Christ doing something good for you.... But NO, it is **not** about God **weighing** our faith, or our goodness, against the possibility of bad events and then deciding whether I, or somebody else, will be rewarded or punished. It isn't about that at all.

What God does promise us, is **not** freedom from pain and loss and grief and death that is part of our humanity....any more than it is freedom from joy and pleasure and togetherness which are **also** a part of our humanity. God encompasses **all** of these human experiences...God knows them, and lives all of them. We are **not** alone, and we do matter. God shares our life. That is one thing. The other important thing for us to remember is that, because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross, and his rising from the dead, God promises us resurrection. That means that God will make something new and renewed out of our lives and of our deaths, and those of everyone for whom Jesus died. We need to take comfort and reassurance from God's promise.

Then we may say , as the words of the Psalm reminded us this morning: *'You have turned my mourning into dancing: You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever'*. **Amen.**

Blessing Prayer from Book: 'ETERNAL ECHOES' the Chapter on suffering as the Dark Valley of Broken Belonging...John O'Donohue. P.183