

PROPER 8, PENTECOST 5, YEAR B, JUNE 27, 2021

At the end of December 2019 my daughter decided to treat my younger sister and I to dinner in NYC and a Broadway show. After dinner, since we had about a little over an hour before we had to be at the theater, I suggested we walk up to Rockefeller Center to see the tree. Well, if you've never been in Manhattan in December pre covid days, the sidewalks were a mass of humanity with people heading in all sorts of directions. What should have been a 10 – 15 minute walk took us over a half hour. By the time we got to Rockefeller Center we had to take pictures of the tree as we rushed past it so we could hustle back to the theatre district with five minutes to spare. We literally had to barrel ourselves through the crowds keeping our shoulders squared and just pushing through. Obviously, in that kind of situation you are getting jostled from all angles and getting touched by everyone. In that kind of setting it isn't about who touched you but who hasn't touched you.

So, imagine this same kind of scenario when we read in today's gospel that Jesus is getting jostled by the crowd when suddenly he asks "Who touched me?" His disciples find his question incredulous? "Are you kidding me, Jesus, look around at the crowds – everyone is touching you?" What is interesting about this exchange is that this little vignette about the woman who touched Jesus is in the middle of another story.

Jesus had just gotten out of the boat when crowds surrounded him and a man named Jairus, who was a synagogue official, came to Jesus and asked him to heal his dying daughter. Jesus was on his way to Jairus' house when he felt someone touch him. That someone was a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Imagine for a moment what it is like to have a debilitating illness for twelve years and no one can give you any relief. On top of dealing with this illness you are declared a literal outcast. In Judaism people were not only estranged from God but from other human beings if they were considered unclean. There were numerous laws about who was considered unclean and who should be excluded from society and bodily discharges was one of them. A whole religious culture was built up around these rules which tried to keep infected unclean people from society while maintaining everything in its place, everything in order, nothing upsetting, while preserving the old prejudices and exclusive systems.

To make matters worse, the person who was unclean, because of bodily flows, was a woman. Women weren't even allowed to talk with men in public let alone touch them. So, this woman who had the issue of blood for 12 years was already prohibited from even speaking with a man in public or touching one. She was an outcast on top of that because of her illness yet she had the audacity and temerity to touch Jesus. The woman's faith in Jesus' ability to heal her was so great that she is convinced she need only reach out and touch the hem of his garment in order to experience his healing power.

Faith in action Jesus told the woman 'Your faith has healed you' She certainly believed that if she touched his clothes she would be healed. But the important thing about this woman was that she did not 'just' have faith, she had the courage to act on it. She believed it so strongly that she risked breaking all the ritual and societal rules about cleanliness to follow what she believed to be true about Jesus. She had a belief that Jesus would accept her and even though she was afraid and trembling, when Jesus asked who touched him, she came to him. She told him the whole truth -- thus incriminating herself

and possibly subjecting herself to further rejection. But as a result of her faith in action, she was accepted as a daughter and was praised for her faith.

Now as I said, this story is sandwiched between the other story about Jairus' daughter. Remember Jairus was a well-off ruler of the synagogue who is leading Jesus to his home when the "unclean" woman interrupts the travel. Look at the irony of this situation. Standing by Jesus is the very person who won't accept her into the synagogue who is bound to uphold the rules that exclude her. Yet Jesus accepts her and goes beyond that. He calls her daughter and by doing so Jesus recognizes her as a worthy individual, accepts her as a child of God and a Daughter of Abraham who is a person entitled to acceptance by the community, and an inheritor of the promises of God. He recognized her faith and hope. I'm sure this was not lost on Jairus.

Just as Jairus witnesses what Jesus has done he is told his daughter has died and not to bother Jesus anymore. But Jesus tells Jairus not to fear but believe. And when they arrive at Jairus' house the mourners have already gathered and basically tell Jairus to accept the fact his daughter is dead and laugh at Jesus suggesting otherwise. Jairus could have easily sent Jesus away at this point but he doesn't. Everything he believed in up to that point had been challenged. So, he looks to Jesus and follows him into the room where his 12 year old daughter lies and we're told she is restored to wholeness, gets up and was given something to eat.

It is interesting to note that the woman who had the issue of blood bled for 12 years and Jairus' daughter is 12 years old. In Judaism the number 12 is significant as it symbolizes the divine and completeness or wholeness with God. So now we have two females who are insignificant in the eyes of the law being restored to fullness and wholeness in God.

What these two people have in common is that they had faith in Jesus. They had faith that their lives might be changed if they followed Jesus and his healing touch in their lives. The ruler of the synagogue, was challenged by this lowly woman, who defiled everyone who touched her, and yet because of her faith was healed. These two people and their faith in Jesus are a clear demonstration of the inclusivity of God's Kingdom here on earth. She, who had nothing left in the world to offer God but herself, her soul, and her body, was found acceptable to God, healed, and made a Child of God, a member of God's Kingdom.

The synagogue leader, well-off and attending to the various rituals and rules of the synagogue, was challenged by this low-status, unclean woman, and in a way, was asked by Jesus to learn from her. Both Jairus and the community learned that day that God's Kingdom includes all people especially the marginalized.

We too are challenged by this story. First, we are challenged to remember it's hard to hear God's voice about who God accepts when you've already decided what you want God to say and who you think is accepted. So we are challenged to think about how each of us are made a Son or Daughter of God, through God's all encompassing love.

We are challenged to ask ourselves can the Christian community, who call Jesus "God with us", alter the conditions of people's lives, especially those who are considered "outsiders," or misfits whether it is related to ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, or any other constructed boundaries in our world - and advocate for the life-giving love of God so we can be a healing presence today to those who are marginalized? Can the Christian community bring healing and acceptance into troubled lives and anxious

circumstances? And if you think there isn't work to be done, St. David's in Kinnelon posted on their sign this week; "God loves everyone no exceptions. Happy Pride! It only took 48 hours for the hate mail to start.

What do we have to do to push through our own prejudices in order to grab hold of God's boundless compassion? What hierarchies, taboos, skepticisms, hatreds, and stereotypes stand in our way of welcoming all of God's people? Jesus is saying to us today be courageous in your faith! As Christ's body, we are called to reach out, touch, and accept those who are treated as "outsiders," and have been cast aside, and ask them to join us in the love of God. May God grant us the courage to be and to do so. Amen.