

“Up Close and Personal”

Mark 5:21-43

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
June 28, 2009

At Smoke Rise, we believe that every member is a minister. We feel so strongly about this that we made it our church motto. Occasionally, banners hang in our hallways to remind us of our calling.

What does it mean to be a minister and how do you minister in the name of Christ? I don't know of a passage of scripture that answers these questions better than today's text. It is a template for all who wish to be faithful followers of Christ.

In our text, Mark has done something that is not that uncommon for him. He has woven two stories together.

Jairus, a leader in the synagogue and a man of great stature and prominence in the community, had a gravely ill daughter. He approached Jesus, fell at his feet and begged him to come to his home and heal her. Jesus agreed to do so and on his way to this man's house, a woman that had been ill for twelve years quietly slipped behind him and touched the tassel at the end of his garment. Immediately Jesus knew that someone had touched him differently than all the others that were pressing against him. He stopped and had a conversation with this scorned woman that confirmed her healing and restored her self-esteem. Jesus continued his journey to Jairus' house, where he resurrected the twelve-year-old girl that died before his arrival.

Jesus graciously brought the presence of the living God into the lives of the people in these stories and they experienced healing and restoration. I believe we can be channels of His grace and power, too. As a matter of fact, this is our calling and when we do so, we become his disciples.

How do we bring the presence of God into the lives of people? We do it the same way Jesus did, one person at a time as we go along our way.

Let me share with you what this passage teaches me about ministry. As I said earlier, I know of few texts that help me understand the nature of ministry as well as this one.

These stories help me understand that ministry is up close and personal. Notice how often touching is mentioned.

“Come and lay your hands on her,” Jairus pleaded with Jesus. “Who touched my clothes?” Jesus asked on his way to Jairus' house when the desperately ill woman touched the hem of his garment. “Jesus took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cum,’ which means, ‘little girl, get up!’ ”

“God uses the physical as a means of grace,” Hope Morgan writes. “It is through the act of touching that faith is demonstrated and healing powers are released.”

Dr. Charles Gurkin is a retired psychologist at Emory. Seminary students at Candler were required to take one of his classes and it was in that class that he told them, “No minister will ever get close to a person he or she is physically unwilling to touch.”

Perhaps this is why, in regard to these stories, Tom Ehrich wrote, “At its best, a faith community is about touch.” I agree.

When you are close enough to touch someone, you can sense how badly they are hurting and what you can do to help them. A bond develops between you and it is as if they become, if for only a moment, a part of your family.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” What did Jesus call this stranger who touched the hem of his garment? Daughter. As far as we know, he had no children. Why would he refer to her this way?

The little girl in the first story had a loving father who was her advocate. Her father set aside pride and protocol to get her help.

It appears this woman had no one to help her, especially someone as loving and strong as a father. So what did Jesus do? In that moment, he became her father and advocate and she became his daughter, which enabled her to leave in peace.

How different would the world be if we looked at everybody that was hurting as a family member? Who needs you to treat them this week as if they were your daughter or son? Are you willing to try?

Ministry is not only up close and personal, it usually occurs spontaneously. This does not mean that mission projects and trips no longer need to be planned. They certainly have their place in the overall ministry of the church. However, even during planned events, the unexpected will occur and schedules need to be set aside.

I have discovered that most of the time ministry occurs as I go about my daily tasks. It seems this is the way it was for Jesus, too. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus was always on the move and frequently interrupted. How did he handle these interruptions? Did he become angry and rude? Did he turn away and ignore the requests? No, he certainly did not in today's text. He stopped, listened to stories and responded with compassion.

How well do you handle interruptions? You may need to talk to the Lord about this. To be candid with you, almost every ministry opportunity will require that you stop what you are doing to listen and respond. I refer to this as the "ministry of stopping." This is not easy. It is, however, necessary.

If you want to know what your priorities are, identify who or what you allow to interrupt you. I must confess that there have been times when I have not considered people in pain very important. How about you?

There is something else this story teaches me about ministry. **At times it is confusing to those around us.** It may not make a lot of sense to them.

When Jesus continued on to Jairus' home even after he had been told the little girl died, those around him did not understand. When he arrived and told the assembled mourners that he was going to help Jairus' daughter, they laughed.

Did that stop him? Did he return their scorn? Did he turn and walk away? No, he did not. He remained focused and proceeded to help her, which was his pattern.

"Throughout his ministry, people mocked Jesus," writes Tom Ehrich. "It was a sign of how uncomfortable he made them. He was deep when they were shallow. He was decent when they were harsh. He was merciful when they were punitive. He imagined healing when they saw only death. He was large when they were small."

You realize that some people mock what they do not understand or like, don't you? Defensive laughter puts distance between people and gives the person that is laughing a feeling of superiority, especially when he or she feels helpless. It certainly doesn't resolve anything.

Has anyone ever laughed at you after finding out that you were helping someone? Did they mock or ridicule you and try to talk you out of it? What did you do?

Helping others requires that we keep our eyes on the person in need and not the naysayers around them. It demands that we be as passionate and tenacious about what we are doing as Jesus was. I know this is not easy, but what a difference it makes when we break the vicious cycle of scorn.

When a Catholic nun and nurse offered aid to a fallen enemy soldier, one of her own soldiers passed by and said, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars!" She quickly replied, "Neither would I."

So why would we follow Jesus' example and become a minister? **Ministry transforms lives.** Do you think Jairus and his family were the same after Jesus helped them? I am convinced they were not. If Jesus had one friend and advocate in the synagogue, it was Jairus.

Do you think the woman that touched the hem of his garment was the same after her encounter with Jesus? Of course she wasn't.

I wonder how many people Jairus and this woman helped along their way. Do you think they ignored one person's plea for help after Jesus stopped and helped them?

Ministry is contagious. There is nothing as fulfilling and meaningful as helping someone who is struggling. There is nothing as inspirational, either.

Whose story inspired you? Who has been inspired by your story? I am convinced that you will have the opportunity to write another chapter this week. Make it a good one.