

“Touched by an Angel”

Mark 5:21-43

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Perhaps you were a fan of the television series, “Touched by an Angel.” It ran for ten years and was nominated for several Golden Globe Awards. Monica, Tess and Andrew were three angels sent to earth to tell depressed and troubled people that God loved them and had not forgotten them. Many say the most famous line to come from that series belonged to Tess when she told someone, “You did not hit bottom; you hit God.”

Our text today revolves around these same themes of grace and hope. It contains two stories that overlap, something that is not unusual in Mark. Four times Mark starts to tell a story and in the middle of the story, he starts another.

Maybe you know people like that. I do and I call them “channel surfers.” They have clicked the remote in their mind and are looking at another scene. They describe a few details before returning to the original story. It is rather hard to follow a person’s line of thought that does this. It requires good listening skills, that’s for sure.

I don’t think Mark changes channels accidentally, though. I believe the overlapping of these stories was intentional.

What do the two main characters have in common? Both are desperate and willing to go to extreme measures to receive help from Jesus. Beyond that, Jesus helps both of them without demanding one thing from them. Jesus graciously brought the presence of the living God into their lives and they experienced healing and restoration.

Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, was a man of prominence with a gravely ill daughter. He fell at Jesus’ 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 Jesus 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 the lady 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.

This story is filled with symbolism and I would like to unpack it this way. Both stories tell of restoration through touch. As a result, this text invites us to do three things: to touch Jesus, to be touched by Jesus and to touch others in Jesus’ name. Let’s look at these ideas.

This text invites us to reach out and touch Jesus. Jairus and this nameless woman did. Both faced challenges they could not handle on their own. No doubt they sought help from a variety of sources, but to no avail. It was time to reach out to this holy man named Jesus.

Listen to the words of Edward Markquart concerning the woman in this story, “You may not have realized it as the text was read that this woman was very much in contrast to the crowd around her. What did the crowd want from Jesus? Did they want healing? No. They wanted to see a religious superstar. They wanted to rub shoulders with Jesus. They wanted to get his autograph. They wanted to chat with a superstar so they could go tell their friends whom they had met. The crowd wasn’t coming to be healed by Jesus. They were not coming to have their lives made whole. They were coming to rub shoulders with Jesus and hoped that they would see one of his miracles first hand so they could entertain their friends with a good story about Jesus the healer.

This still happens in the life of the church. It is still possible for great numbers of people to come to church and hear stories about Jesus. They come to see their friends, have their children influenced by the ministries the church offers, but they do not necessarily come to find healing for their own lives.

It is possible for us to come to church not for the purpose of having Christ make our lives whole because we don't see any need for healing. Things are pretty good in our lives. We don't need to be healed. We have come to church because this is what we do on Sunday mornings.

What I like about this woman that had been sick for twelve years is that she told the truth about herself. She saw that she needed to be healed. She was aware of her disease and inner anxiety about it. She was aware that she did not have her life all together. So she came that day with no façade. She came asking for Jesus to heal her and reached out to touch him."

Today's text invites us to follow her example. I encourage you to be honest and reach out to Jesus for help in those areas of your life that are most troubling and challenging. Allow him to bring the living presence of God into your life so you can experience healing and restoration. Don't miss this opportunity today.

We also need to be touched by Jesus and quite frankly, this may be more of a challenge than reaching out to him. Far too many people refuse Jesus' offer to help them find health and wholeness because they refuse to push aside pride or inferiority. These could have prevented Jairus and this woman from receiving help.

Jairus was one of the most prominent and influential men in his community. He was the man with all the answers and sufficient resources to solve problems. This woman, on the other hand, lived the life of a leper, an outcast whose name was not even known. Pride or inferiority could have kept each of them from receiving help from Jesus. They can do this to us, too.

One of Mark's most potent lessons in writing these two stories is this. Jesus wants to help all of us to become whole and this process begins with a willing spirit.

Concerning Jarius' daughter, William Willimon writes, "Too many of my sermons implicitly suggest that in order to be a Christian and receive help from Jesus you have got to try hard to believe this or that. You have got to straighten up and get your life together. You have got to feel certain things in your heart.

Well, pay attention to this story. In this story about the healing of Jairus' daughter, no one does anything except cry out in the face of death. No one, as far as I can tell, believes, feels or thinks anything. It is a story, not about us and what we are to do, but about Jesus and what he does. As Robert Capon writes, 'The only qualification for the gift of the Gospel is to be dead. You don't have to be smart. You don't have to be good. You don't have to be wise. You don't have to be wonderful. You don't have to be anything but dead. That's it!'"

This morning, let Jesus touch you and give you new life. You don't have to do anything to impress him or convince him that you are worthy of his grace. Open your heart to him now and feel his tender touch.

This text invites us to do one more thing. **It invites us to touch others in Jesus' name.** As his disciples, we are to follow his example and reach out to others in his name. We are to be the presence of Christ in a broken world bringing hope and healing to all that are suffering.

At a church retreat that focused upon handling adversity with strength and courage, a lady brought a basket full of cards to the communion table. "If you want to know how I survived numerous cancer treatments, you need to look into this basket. Over three hundred cards and letters are here from people that prayed for me and encouraged me not to give up. They reached out and touched me in Jesus' name and it made all the difference in the world."

I have been told the same thing by Pat Thomas and Ernie Forrester in recent days. You have embraced both of them and their families as they have said goodbye to their loved ones, Mark Thomas and Debbie Forrester. You have brought hope and healing to them in Jesus' name and your compassionate touch has made a difference.

Allow me to close with a powerful story of "touch" that was shared by Bill Smith on the night of Mark Thomas' visitation at the funeral home. At the conclusion of a worship service not long ago, Bill and Claire stood for the benediction. During the final prayer, Bill felt a hand upon his. He opened his eyes and saw Mark Thomas standing next to him. Mark had walked from the

choir to Bill's pew. This was no easy task for Mark as he was already walking with the aid of a cane, the result of several brain tumors that were growing.

When the benediction was over, Mark looked at Bill and said, "I wanted to come and thank you and Claire for the card of encouragement you sent me. It meant so much to me especially after all you have been through." Mark was referring to the death of Bill and Claire's twenty-one-year-old son, Wes, and the fact they were "wounded healers."

This is what it means to reach out in Jesus' name. This is what it means to be the presence of Christ in a broken world bringing hope and healing to those that are hurting. This is what it means to be the church. This is what it means to be touched by an angel. This is what it means to be an angel.